EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,

and be thy guide,

In thy most need to go by thy side

ANATOLE FRANCE

Pseudonym of Jacques Antoine Anatole Thibault. Born in Paris, 16th April 1844. Elected to membership of French Academy in 1896. Awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1921. Died at Tours, 13th October 1924.

ANATOLE FRANCE

At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque

The Revolt of the Angels

TRANSLATED BY
MRS WILFRED JACKSON

INTRODUCTION BY
A. J. HOPPÉ

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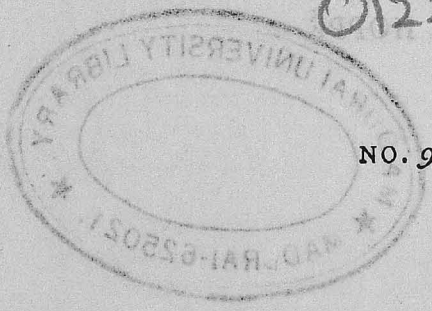

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INTRODUCTION

ANATOLE FRANCE is the pseudonym of Jacques Antoine Anatole Thibault, who was born in Paris on 16th April 1844, the son of a bookseller of peasant stock from a small town in Anjou. Until the age of twenty-one the father could not read or write; he taught himself during his service in the army, and in doing so gained such a love of books that shortly after returning to civil life he set up as a bookseller on the famous Paris *quais*. From his name François came the abbreviation France, by which the father was called by his friends, and which the son used as his pen-name on all his writings. Anatole was brought up ('a mother's boy,' some say) in the bookshop-home, and was educated at the Collège Stanislas, the influence of which he has compared unfavourably with that of the gracious school of home and the kaleidoscopic city of Paris. He resolved at an early age to be a writer; he joined literary circles, studied old manuscripts, wrote on bibliographical matters, contributed prefaces to French classics in *éditions de bibliophile*, and wrote a monograph on Alfred de Vigny; he became one of the staff of the Senate Library, and later of Larousse's *Dictionary*; and, at last, at the age of twenty-nine, published a first book of poems, *Poèmes dorés*.

The origins of Anatole France are the clues to his character and writings, which bespeak the Parisian, the bibliophile, the classicist, and the common man. The wit, sensuality, and iconoclasm in his books may appear to consort strangely with his love of the traditional, but it is from that alternating communion and conflict of learning and licentiousness, of reason and romanticism, of the mundane and the divine, that the greatness of France's work arises.

The two books in this volume are probably the most representative—not to say the best—of the main body of his work. Fortunately for the English reader (for whom the works of Anatole France have been interpreted by

several translators, able but with differing styles) both these books were excellently translated by the same hand, that of Mrs Wilfred Jackson. That may be indicative of the affinities between them. The world of savants and wits and *bons viveurs* is in both books, and the fantastic linking of heaven and earth, too—patently in the theme of *The Revolt of the Angels*, and in the discourses on alchemy and cabbalism, sylphs and salamanders and their contacts with the lower world, in *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*.

La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque was published in 1893, and is the first considerable work from France's pen to show all his characteristics. The earlier short stories in *Balthasar* and *Mother of Pearl*; the sentimental-professor story, *The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*, which gained the author his first wide public; the powerful sensual-ascetic story, *Thaïs*; and the reminiscent *My Friend's Book*—all these contained seeds of the France who blossomed in full in *La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque*. Here is the rich maturity which France reached after much time and infinite effort, a maturity that was recognized by his election to membership of the French Academy three years after the publication of *Reine Pédauque*. It brings to the reader a world of invention created equally out of book-learning and zest in life.

The literary frame in which France sets the story is an old MS., 'in a fine handwriting of the eighteenth century,' said to be written by one Ménétrier, whose father kept a cookshop at the sign of the Reine Pédauque. In it the writer, nicknamed Jacques Tournebroche, tells the tale and records the opinions of his penniless benefactor and fellow traveller, the Abbé Jérome Coignard, that splendid failure, whose make-up of saint and sinner has endeared him to countless readers. Coignard, erring priest, and Jacques, turnspit become scholar, proceed on their journeyings, meeting hospitality and rebuff from male and female with jubilant resignation, wining and dining, pursued by bellicose aristocrat or revengeful Jew, still finding time to discuss the eternal verities and to go on fitfully with the Abbé's task of translating Zozimus the Panopolitan. And when the Abbé dies, 'struck down

on the Lyons road by the scoundrelly hand of a Jew,' Jacques returns to his parents at the Reine Pédauque and becomes assistant to their neighbour, Blaizot, the bookseller at the sign of St Catherine, there to reflect no doubt on Coignard's reminiscence of his youth and the lady bookseller at the sign of the Bible d'or where 'all the poets, all the orators, all the historians, all the theologians . . . witnessed our embraces.' *At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque* may recall all sorts of greater books from *Tom Jones* and *A Sentimental Journey* to *Don Quixote* and Rabelais, and it certainly has a quality of is own which is irresistible.

As the *Reine Pédauque* marks the real establishment of Anatole France, so *The Revolt of the Angels*, published twenty years later, very nearly marks the end—although we must not be ungrateful for the two later and delightful books of reminiscences of childhood and adolescence, *Little Pierre* and *The Bloom of Life*. Between *Reine Pédauque* and *The Revolt of the Angels* come most of France's best-known other books. Among them are: *The Opinions of Jerome Coignard*, a sequel to *Reine Pédauque*; *The Red Lily*, a powerful straightforward novel of jealousy; the famous Monsieur Bergeret series of stories of French political and social life—*The Elm Tree on the Mall*, *The Amethyst Ring*, and *Monsieur Bergeret in Paris*; *A Mummer's Tale*, another tale of love and intrigue recalling *The Red Lily*; several volumes of short stories—*Clio*, *Crainquebille*, *The White Stone*, *The Seven Wives of Bluebeard*, and, another 'sequel' to *Reine Pédauque*, *The Merrie Tales of Jacques Tournebroche*; the strong yet still Francian novel of the French Revolution, *The Gods are Athirst*; a *Life of Joan of Arc*; and the famous *Penguin Island*. A politico-philosophical satire, *Penguin Island* is in the same category as *The Revolt of the Angels*, but it is a simpler, indeed a cruder, work, open to easier appreciation and lacking the subtlety, the invention, and the beauty of the later book. Once the Penguins have changed to humans, the work takes the form of an ironic history of France in the modern part of which the Dreyfus affair looms large. In *The Revolt of the Angels* (which Anatole France regarded as his best book) the celestial and the earthly run side by side throughout. The story

opens in a typical France setting, in a magnificent private library, where Arcade, guardian angel of Maurice d'Esparvieu, son of the owner of the library, is invisibly stealing the rarest volumes, and incidentally driving the librarian off his head. Arcade consorts with other fallen angels, who in their terrestrial life are artists, freethinkers, anarchists, philosophers, men of the world or the underworld, ladies of virtue or easy virtue. If the angels are in part of the earth earthy, in the humans there is a touch of heaven. War, revolution, power, greed, lust—these are of the spirit as well as of the body, as peace, moderation, contentment are of the body as well as of the spirit. Old Nectaire, the heavenly rustic, relates in the 'Gardener's Story' a short history of the world, which is not without hope for humanity. Maurice d'Esparvieu, faced with losing Arcade as his guardian angel, exclaims: 'Well, then, I will be your guardian angel—I will not leave you!'

Written and published just before the outbreak of the 1914–18 war, *The Revolt of the Angels* is a prophetic satire of the world as it was then, and, indeed as it is always. 'Bethink you,' says one of the spirits, 'Ialdabaoth has little general culture, but he is a soldier—to the marrow of his bones. The organization of Paradise is a thoroughly military organization. It is founded on hierarchy and discipline. Passive obedience is imposed here as a fundamental law. The angels form an army. Compare this spot with the Elysian fields which Virgil depicts for you. In the Elysian fields reign liberty, reason, and wisdom. The happy shades hold converse together in the groves of myrtle. In the heaven of Ialdabaoth there is no civil population. Every one is enrolled, numbered, registered. It is a barracks and a field for manœuvres.' Totalitarian heaven! Indeed the babel of ideologies and rationalized instincts is in this book: social revolution; political plotting in the national, the international, the universal spheres; armament dealing between financiers and merchants of death who do not mind war or revolution provided it is 'elsewhere,' who are out to do good business even in a celestial war. Conclaves of rebellious angels, gatherings of sanguinary idealists! But it is all told and

tempered with the epicurean spirit and in the elegant prose of Anatole France.

One of the paradoxes of France's career is that in the last years of his life the tradition-steeped yet sceptical philosopher gave his unqualified allegiance to the authoritarian and revolutionary Communist party. He appeared to accept the iron laws of the Comintern. 'In politics,' he said to his biographer and English editor, Mr J. Lewis May, 'one must take a definite side, in politics there is no room for philosophic doubt.' His association with the Left in politics began many years before with his vigorous support of Zola in the Dreyfus affair, when he was one of the signatories of the 'Protestation des Intellectuels.' He was a liberal and a democrat like most of the French writers of the time. The 1914–18 war confused and finally embittered his outlook, and he did not hesitate to express unorthodox views, particularly on the Versailles Treaty.

It was in the years following the war that his writings reached their widest popularity among English readers. In 1921 he received the Nobel Prize for Literature, and in 1922 all his works (though surely some stimulate Catholic faith) were placed on the Index by the Pope. Both these events are indicative of the widespread interest in his books at that time. He accepted both the honours and the denials with classic eloquence, what time, no doubt, he continued his subscriptions to the Marxist party. Like every grand-old-man-of-letters he was certainly overpraised. The accounts of literary pilgrimages to his Villa Saïd and La Béchellerie, and the constant hailing of him as 'Master!' must be balanced by the riposte of his housekeeper: '"The Master! The Master!"' she would repeat in a muttering tone, 'why do you call him the Master? He's only master of his soup, when he eats it, and even then only when it's in his mouth.'

A few years after his death in 1924, his fame suffered some reaction, but almost all of his books have stood the test of time, and in his own class he is at the top. Over troubled days, confused beliefs, and lustful life he spread his benign and Puckish spirit. In dressing-gown and skull cap, *en pantoufles* (as he appears in all the best-known portraits by

artists or photographers), man of letters and son of the people, thinking and twinkling, he is in many ways the Spirit of his Age and of his land, France.

A. J. HOPPÉ

The following are the chief works of Anatole France, the English title being given where translations have been published:

Alfred de Vigny, 1868; *Les Poèmes dorés*, 1873; *Les Noces corinthiennes*, 1876 (*The Bride of Corinth*); *Jocaste et le Chat maigre*, 1879 (*Jocasta and the Famished Cat*); *Le Crime de Sylvestre Bonnard*, 1881 (*The Crime of Sylvestre Bonnard*); *Les Désirs de Jean Servien*, 1882 (*The Aspirations of Jean Servien*); *Le Livre de mon ami*, 1885 (*My Friend's Book*); *La Vie littéraire*, 1888–92 (*On Life and Letters: Four Series*); *Balthasar* 1889 (*Balthasar*); *Thaïs*, 1890 (*Thaïs*); *L'Étui de nacre*, 1892 (*Mother of Pearl*); *La Rôtisserie de la Reine Pédauque*, 1893 (*At the Sign of the Reine Pédauque*); *Les Opinions de M. Jérôme Coignard*, 1893 (*The Opinions of Jerome Coignard*); *Le Lys rouge*, 1894 (*The Red Lily*); *Le Jardin d'Épicure*, 1895 (*The Garden of Epicurus*); *Le Puits de Sainte-Claire*, 1895 (*The Well of St Clare*); *Le Mannequin d'osier*, 1897 (*The Wickerwork Woman*); *L'Orme du mail*, 1897 (*The Elm Tree on the Mall*); *L'Anneau d'améthyste*, 1899 (*The Amethyst Ring*); *Pierre Nozière*, 1899 (*Pierre Nozière*); *Clio*, 1900 (*Clio*); *Monsieur Bergeret à Paris*, 1901 (*Monsieur Bergeret in Paris*); *Histoire comique*, 1903 (*A Mummer's Tale*); *Crainquebille, Putois, Riquet, etc.*, 1904 (*Crainquebille*); *Sur la pierre blanche*, 1903 (*The White Stone*); *L'Île des pingouins*, 1908 (*Penguin Island*); *Vie de Jeanne d'Arc*, 1908 (*The Life of Joan of Arc*); *Les Contes de Jacques Tournebroche*, 1908 (*The Merrie Tales of Jacques Tournebroche*); *Les Sept Femmes de la Barbe-Bleue*, 1909 (*The Seven Wives of Bluebeard*); *Les Dieux ont soif*, 1912 (*The Gods are Athirst*); *Le Génie latin*, 1913 (*The Latin Genius*); *La Révolte des anges*, 1914 (*The Revolt of the Angels*); *Sur la voie glorieuse*, 1915 (*The Path of Glory*); *Le Petit Pierre*, 1918 (*Little Pierre*); *La Vie en fleur*, 1922 (*The Bloom of Life*).

Books in English about Anatole France include:

Anatole France and his Circle, a record of conversations with his friends, edited by Paul Gsell. translated by Frederic Lees, 1922. *Anatole France: The Man and his Work*, by James Lewis May, 1924. *Anatole France Himself*, by Jean J. Brousson, translated by John Pollock, 1925. *The Opinions of Anatole France*, by Nicolas Ségur, translated by J. Lewis May, 1928. *Anatole France*, by Lewis P. Shanks, 1932. *Anatole France, 1844–96*, by Edwin P. Durgan, 1937.

The English translations of the works of Anatole France are published by John Lane (The Bodley Head) Ltd, by arrangement with whom this *Everyman's Library* volume is issued.

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AT THE SIGN OF THE REINE PÉDAUQUE

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AT THE SIGN OF THE REINE PÉDAUQUE[1]

PREFACE

It is my design to recount the singular adventures of my life. Some of them have been strange and some beautiful. In bringing them back to memory it is doubtful even to myself whether I have not dreamt them. I once knew a Gascon cabbalist, whom I cannot call wise, for he perished very unhappily, who, however, one night, in the Isle of Swans, entranced me with the sublime discourse that I have been fortunate enough to keep in mind and careful to put in writing. His discourse treated of magic and the occult sciences, which run so much in people's heads to-day. One hears of nothing but the *Rosy Cross*.[2] For the matter of that, I do not flatter myself that I shall gain much honour by these revelations. Some will say that I have invented it all, and that it is not the true doctrine; others, that I have only told what every one knew before. I allow that I am not very well grounded in the Cabbala, my master having perished at the beginning of my initiation. But the little that I did learn of his art made me very strongly suspect that it is all illusion, fraud, and vanity. Besides, it is enough for me to know that magic is contrary to religion for me to reject it with my whole heart. Nevertheless, I think I ought to make myself clear on one point of this false science in order that I may not be thought more ignorant than I am. I know that cabbalists in general think that sylphs, salamanders, elves, and gnomes are

[1] The original manuscript, in a fine handwriting of the eighteenth century, bears as sub-title: 'The Life and Opinions of Abbé Jérôme Coignard.' (*Author's Note.*)

[2] This was written during the latter half of the eighteenth century. (*Author's Note.*)

born with a soul as perishable as their body, and that they acquire immortality by commerce with the magi.[1] My cabbalist taught me, on the contrary, that eternal life was the birthright of no creature, whether terrestrial or aerial. I have followed his opinion without pretending to judge of it.

He was in the habit of saying that elves kill those who reveal their mysteries, and he attributed to the vengeance of these spirits the death of Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, who was assassinated on the Lyons road. But I know well that his death, ever to be deplored, had a more natural cause. I shall speak freely of the genii of water and fire. One must needs run divers risks in life, and that from the elves is small in the extreme.

I have jealously garnered the sayings of my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard, who perished as I have just said. 'Twas a man full of wisdom and piety. Had he known more peace of soul, he might have equalled Monsieur l'Abbé Rollin[2] in virtue, as he far surpassed him in range of knowledge and depth of understanding. At least he had in the turmoil of a troubled life the advantage over Monsieur Rollin in that he did not fall into Jansenism. For the strength of his intelligence remained unshaken by any violence of rash doctrines, and I can bear witness before God to the purity of his faith. He had a great knowledge of the world, acquired by frequenting every kind of company. This experience would have served him well in the history of Rome that he would doubtless have composed, in imitation of Monsieur Rollin, had not time and leisure failed him, and if his way of life had better assorted with his genius. What I can relate of so excellent a man will be an ornament to my memoirs. Like Aulus Gellius who gives the finest passages of the philosophers in his *Attic*

[1] This opinion is notably maintained in a small book by Abbé Montfaucon de Villars: *The Comte de Gabalis, or Conversations on the Secret and Mysterious Sciences following the Principles of the Ancient Magi or Cabbalist Sages.* There are several editions. I will content myself with citing the one published at Amsterdam (by Jacques Le Jeune, 1700, in 18mo, illustrated) which contains a second part, which is not in the original edition. (*Author's Note.*)

[2] Abbé, Jansenist, historian, 1661–1741.

Nights, like Apuleius who puts in his *Golden Ass* the best fables of the Greeks, I undertake a bee-like industry and hope to gather the most exquisite honey. Nevertheless, I cannot flatter myself to the point of thinking that I can emulate these two great authors, since it is only from the recollections of my own life and not from wide and varied reading that I draw all my riches. What I supply of my own material is my good faith. If ever any one is curious enough to read my memoirs, he will recognize that only a simple soul could express itself in language so simple and coherent. I was always thought simple-minded in every company I have mixed in, and this work can but perpetuate this opinion after my death.

1

My name is Elme-Laurent-Jacques Ménétrier. My father, Léonard Ménétrier, kept a cook-shop in the rue Saint-Jacques at the sign of the 'Reine Pédauque,' whose feet, as one knows, were webbed after the fashion of ducks and geese.

His projecting gable rose opposite Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné, between Madame Gilles, the draper, at the sign of the 'Trois-Pucelles,' and Monsieur Blaizot, the book-seller, at the sign of the 'Image of St Catherine,' and not far from the 'Petit Bacchus,' whose railing decorated with vine-branches formed the corner of the rue des Cordiers. He was very fond of me, and when I lay in my little bed after supper he would take my hand in his, and, raising my fingers one after the other, beginning with the thumb, would say:

'This one killed it, this one plucked it, this one fried it, and this one ate it. And here 's little Riquiqui, who gets nothing at all.'

'Sauce, sauce, sauce,' he would add, tickling the palm of my hand with the tip of my little finger.

And he laughed loudly. I laughed also till I fell asleep, and my mother vowed that the smile was still on my lips next morning.

My father was a good cook and feared God. That is why on feast-days he carried the banner of the cooks, whereon was embroidered a beautiful St Laurence with his gridiron and his golden palm. My father used to say to me:

'Jacquot, your mother is a saintly and worthy woman.'

It was a remark he was fond of repeating. And in truth my mother went to church every Sunday carrying a book printed in large letters. For she could not read small print well, saying it dragged the eyes out of her head. My father spent an hour or two every evening at the inn of the 'Petit Bacchus,' where Jeannette, the hurdy-gurdy

player, and Catherine, the lace-maker, would also repair. And whenever he returned a little later than usual he would say in a softened voice as he donned his cotton night-cap: 'Barbe, sleep in peace. As I told the lame cutler but a moment ago, you are a saintly and worthy woman.'

I was six years of age when one day, readjusting his apron, always a sign in him of having come to a decision, he spoke to me as follows:

'Miraut, our faithful dog, has turned my spit for fourteen years. I have nothing to say against him. He is a good servant who has never robbed me of the smallest morsel of turkey or goose, happy if, as reward for his work, he was allowed to lick the jack. But he is growing old. His paws are stiffening, he no longer sees, and he is of no use for turning the wheel. Jacquot, it is for you, my son, to take his place. With care and a little practice you will succeed as well as he.'

Miraut heard these words and wagged his tail in sign of approval.

'Very well, then, seated on this stool you will turn the spit. Nevertheless, so as to form your mind you can go over your catechism, and when, later on, you are able to read all the printed letters you can learn by heart some book of grammar, or instruction, or yet again the admirable teachings of the Old and New Testament. For knowledge of God and of the distinction between good and evil are necessary even in the practice of a routine such as mine, a condition of little standing, no doubt, but honest, and after all that of my father, and yet one day thine, please God.'

From that day forward, seated from morning till evening in the chimney-corner, I turned the spit, my catechism open on my knees. A good-natured Capuchin, who came bag in hand to beg of my father, helped me with my spelling. He did it all the more willingly for that my father, who respected knowledge, paid him for his lessons with a good slice of turkey and a big glass of wine, so that at length the little brother, seeing that I could put together syllables and words fairly well, brought me a beautiful *Life of St Margaret* wherein he taught me to read with fluency.

One day, putting his wallet on the counter according to custom, he came and sat down near me, and warming his bare feet in the ashes on the hearth, he made me repeat for the hundredth time:

'Virgin wise and pure and fair,
Help a mother's pains to bear,
Have pity on us all.'

At that moment a man, thickset but of fine presence, clad in ecclesiastical garb, came into the kitchen and cried in a loud voice:

'Hallo, mine host! Serve me with something good.'

Under his grey hair he looked in the prime of life and strength. His mouth laughed, his eyes sparkled. His rather heavy jowl and triple chin sloped with majesty on to his clerical bands, become, by sympathy no doubt, as greasy as the neck that overhung them. My father, courteous by profession, doffed his cap and said as he bowed:

'If your reverence will warm himself at my fire I will serve him with what he requires.'

Without any further pressing the Abbé took his place before the fire beside the Capuchin.

Hearing the good brother read:

'Virgin wise and pure and fair,
Help a mother's pains to bear . . .

he clapped his hands and said:

'Oh, what a rare bird! What an uncommon man! A Capuchin who can read! What are you called, little brother?'

'Brother Ange, an unworthy Capuchin,' answered my master.

My mother, who had heard voices from her room above, came down into the shop, drawn by curiosity.

The Abbé greeted her with a politeness that was already friendly, and said:

'Here is something to be admired, madame, Brother Ange is a Capuchin, and he can read.'

'He can read anything written,' answered my mother.

And, approaching the brother, she recognized the

prayer of St Margaret by the picture representing the virgin martyr, holy-water sprinkler in hand.

'This prayer is difficult to read,' she added, 'because the words are quite short and are scarcely separated the one from the other. Happily, it suffices, when in pain, to apply it as a poultice to the part that hurts the most, and it acts thus as well and even better than when recited. I have put it to the test, monsieur, at the birth of my son Jacquot, here present.'

'Do not doubt it, my good madame,' said Brother Ange. 'The prayer to St Margaret is a sovereign remedy for what you say, on the express condition that alms be given to the Capuchins.'

With these words Brother Ange emptied the goblet which my mother had filled to the brim for him, threw his wallet over his shoulder, and went off in the direction of the 'Petit Bacchus.' My father served the Abbé with a portion of chicken, and he, drawing from his pocket a slice of bread, a flask of wine, and a knife whose copper handle represented the late king as a Roman emperor on an antique column, began his supper.

But he had barely put the first morsel of food in his mouth before he stopped and, turning to my father, asked for salt, appearing surprised that he had not been offered the salt-cellar before.

'It was customary,' said he, 'among the ancients to offer salt as a sign of hospitality. Moreover, they placed salt-cellars in the temples on the tables of the gods.'

My father handed him grey salt in the wooden shoe which hung in the chimney corner. The Abbé took what he wanted and said:

'The ancients looked upon salt as a necessary seasoning for all meals, and they rated it so highly that they gave the metaphorical name of salt to all witticisms which added savour to conversation.'

'Ah,' said my father, 'however highly your ancients may have held it, the salt tax of to-day puts a still higher price upon it.'

My mother, who listened as she knitted a woollen stocking, was pleased to put in her word:

'One must believe salt is a good thing, for the priest puts a grain of it on the tongues of infants held at the baptismal font. When my Jacquot felt the salt on his tongue he made a face, for small as he was he had already some sense. I am speaking, Monsieur l'Abbé, of my son Jacques, here present.'

The Abbé looked at me and said:

'He is a big boy now. Modesty is depicted on his face, and he is reading the *Life of St Margaret* attentively.'

'Oh,' replied my mother, 'he can also read the prayer against chilblains and the prayer of St Hubert, both of which Brother Ange has given him, and the history of him who was devoured in the Faubourg Saint-Marcel by several devils for having blasphemed the holy name of God.'

My father looked at me with admiration, then whispered in the Abbé's ear that I learnt all I wished with inborn and natural facility.

'Well, then, we must give him a taste for good literature,' replied the Abbé, 'which is the ornament of man, a consolation in this life, and a remedy for all ills, even those of love, as the poet Theocritus affirms.'

'Cook though I am, I venerate knowledge,' said my father, 'and I am willing to believe that it is a cure for love, as your grace says. But I do not think it is a cure for hunger.'

'Perhaps it is not a universal panacea,' answered the Abbé, 'but it brings some solace with it, after the manner of an exceeding sweet balm, imperfect though it may be.'

As he was thus talking, Catherine, the lace-maker, appeared on the threshold, her cap over one ear and her fichu tumbled. At the sight of her my mother frowned and dropped three stitches of her knitting.

'Monsieur Ménétrier,' said Catherine, 'come and speak to the officers of the watch. If you don't, they will take Brother Ange off to prison without fail. The good brother came into the 'Petit Bacchus' a moment ago and drank two or three pots of wine without paying, for fear, he said, of wanting in respect to the rule of St Francis. But the worst part of the affair is that, seeing me in the

arbour with friends, he came up to me to teach me a new prayer. I told him it was not the right moment, but as he became insistent the lame cutler, who was close beside me, pulled him away by the beard. Then Brother Ange flung himself on the cutler, who rolled on the ground pulling over the table and the jugs with him. The innkeeper rushed up on hearing the noise, and seeing the table overthrown, the wine spilt, and Brother Ange, one foot on the cutler's head, brandishing a stool with which he hit all who came near him, this wicked landlord swore like a fiend, and fled to call the watch. Monsieur Ménétrier, come without delay, come and rescue the little brother from the hands of the officers! He is a holy man and there is excuse to be made for him in this matter.'

My father was inclined to be obliging to Catherine. Nevertheless, this time the lace-maker's words did not produce the effect she expected. He replied sharply that he saw no excuse for the Capuchin, and that he hoped he would be well punished with bread and water in the blackest dungeon cell of the convent whose shame and disgrace he seemed to be.

He became heated as he spoke:

'A drunkard and a debauchee to whom I give good wine and good cheer daily, and who goes off to the pot-house to wanton with trollops who are abandoned enough to prefer the society of a peddling cutler and a Capuchin to that of honest tradesmen of the neighbourhood. Fie!'

He stopped short at this part of his invective and looked stealthily at my mother, who, standing stiff and straight by the staircase, was knitting with short, sharp jerks of her needles.

Catherine, surprised at this bad reception, said dryly:

'So you won't speak a good word for him to the innkeeper and the guard?'

'If you like I will tell them to take the cutler with the Capuchin.'

'But,' she said, laughing, 'the cutler is your friend.'

'More your friend than mine,' said my father irritably. 'A beggar who tugs at a strap and limps.'

'Oh, as to that, it is quite true that he limps. He limps,

he limps, he limps!' And she left the cook-shop bursting with laughter.

My father turned to the Abbé, who was scraping a bone with his knife.

'As I have had the honour to explain to your grace, every lesson in reading and writing that this Capuchin gives to my child I have paid for in goblets of wine and succulent slices of hare, rabbit, goose, nay, even of woodcock and capon. He is a drunkard and a debauchee.'

'No doubt about that,' replied the Abbé.

'But if he dare set foot in my house again I will drive him out with a broom.'

'Quite right,' said the Abbé. 'This Capuchin is an ass, and he would teach your son to bray rather than to talk. You will do well to throw into the fire this *Life of St Margaret*, his prayer against chilblains, and this story of the were-wolf with which the monk poisons your son's mind. At the price Brother Ange got for his lessons I will give you mine. I will teach the child Latin and Greek, and even French, which Voiture and Balzac have so perfected. Thus, by a twofold good fortune, for it is both rare and beneficent, Jacquot Tournebroche shall become learned, and I shall have a meal every day.'

'Done!' said my father. 'Barbe, bring two goblets. There is no business settled when the parties have not touched glasses in sign of agreement. We will drink here. I never want to set foot in the 'Petit Bacchus' again, this cutler and this monk have filled me with such disgust.'

The Abbé got up and, placing his hands on the back of his chair, said slowly and gravely:

'Before all I thank God, Creator and Preserver of all good things, for having led me to this fostering household. It is He alone who guides us, and we should acknowledge His providence in human affairs, though it may be rash and at times unfitting to obey it too blindly. For, being universal, His providence is to be encountered in all sorts of cases, sublime, assuredly, by reason of God's part in them, but obscene or ridiculous for the part played in them by men, and which is the only side they show us. So we must not, like monks and old women, invoke the

finger of God every time the cat jumps. Let us praise God, and beseech Him to enlighten me in the teaching which I shall give this child, and, for the rest, let us incline ourselves to His holy will, without seeking to understand it in everything.'

Then, raising his glass, he took a great gulp of wine.

'This wine induces a soft and salutary heat in the workings of the human body,' he said. 'It is a liquor worthy of celebration at Teos and in the Temple by the princes of bacchic song, Anacreon and Chaulieu. It must touch the lips of my youthful disciple.'

He put the beaker to my chin and cried:

'Come, O bees of Academe, and light in harmonious swarm on the lips, henceforth sacred to the Muses, of Jacobus Tournebroche.'

'Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé,' my mother said, 'it is true that wine will draw bees, more particularly when it is sweet wine. But you must not wish those evil insects to light on the lips of my Jacquot, for their sting is cruel. One day when biting into a peach I was stung on the tongue by a bee, and I suffered the torments of the damned. And nothing eased me till Brother Ange put in my mouth a pinch of earth moistened with saliva while he repeated the prayer to St Cosmas.'

The Abbé made her understand that he spoke of bees in an allegorical sense. And my father said to her in a tone of reproach:

'Barbe, you are a saintly and worthy woman, but I have often remarked that you have an annoying habit of rushing headlong into a serious conversation at the wrong time.'

'Maybe,' replied my mother. 'But if you had paid more attention to my advice, Léonard, you would be better off. I can't be expected to know all the different kinds of bees, but I know how to conduct a household, and what is proper behaviour for a man of certain age, who is father of a family, and banner-bearer in his guild.'

My father scratched his ear, and poured out some more wine for the Abbé, who said, sighing:

'Certes, knowledge is no longer honoured in our day, in the kingdom of France, as it was among the Romans

when, though fallen from their pristine virtues, rhetoric raised Eugenius to the purple. It is no rare thing in our time to see an able man in a garret without fire or light. *Exemplum ut talpa.* I am an example.'

He then gave us an account of his life, which I will report to you as it came from his lips, save where in places my tender years hindered me from understanding it plainly, and consequently from retaining it in my memory. But I believe that I have been able to fill up such gaps from the confidences he made me later, when he honoured me with his friendship.

II

'SUCH as you see me,' he said, 'or, to put it better, such as you do not see me, young, lithe, bright-eyed, and black-haired, I taught the liberal arts in the college of Beauvais under Messieurs Dugué, Guérin, Coffin,[1] and Baffier. I had taken orders, and I thought to make myself a great reputation in letters. But a woman overthrew my hopes. She was one Nicole Pigoreau, and she kept a bookshop at the sign of the 'Bible d'or,' on the square in front of the college. I was in the habit of going there, for ever turning over the pages of the books she received from Holland, and also those Bipontine [2] editions furnished with notes, glosses, and learned commentaries. I was a pleasing youth, and, to my misfortune, Madame Pigoreau recognized it. She had been pretty, and could still attract. Her eyes could speak. One day Cicero and Livy, Plato, Aristotle, Thucydides, Polybius and Varro, Epictetus, Seneca, Boëthius and Cassiodorus, Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Plautus and Terence, Diodorus Siculus,[3] Dionysius of Halicarnassus,[4] St John Chrysostom and St Basil, St Jerome and St Augustine, Erasmus, Salmasius,

[1] He succeeded Rollin as principal of College of Beauvais, 1676–1749.

[2] Published at Zweibrücken. [3] Greek historian of Augustan age.

[4] Greek historian, b. 54 B.C.

Turnebus [1] and Scaliger,[2] St Thomas Aquinas, St Bonaventure, Bossuet with Ferri [3] in his train, Lenain,[4] Godefroy,[5] Mezéray,[6] Mainbourg,[7] Fabricius,[8] Father Lelong,[9] and Father Pitou,[10] all the poets, all the orators, all the historians, all the fathers, all the doctors, all the theologians, all the humanists, all the compilers, assembled on the walls from ceiling to floor, witnessed our embraces. "You are irresistible," she said. "Do not think too badly of me."

'She avowed her love in raptures inconceivable. One day she made me try on some bands and ruffles of lace and, finding they suited me to perfection, she begged me to keep them. I did not want to do so at all. But as she seemed irritated at my refusal, wherein she saw a slight to her love, I consented to take what she offered me for fear of offending her.

'My happiness lasted until I was replaced by an officer. I was filled with anger and spite, and, hot for vengeance, I made it known to the governors of the college that I no longer repaired to the 'Bible d'or' lest I should see there sights likely to offend the modesty of a young cleric. Truth to tell, I had no need to congratulate myself on this trick. For Madame Pigoreau, hearing of my behaviour in regard to her, told every one that I had stolen from her some lace bands and ruffles. Her false accusation came to the ears of the governors, who had my box searched, and there they found the set, which was sufficiently valuable. They turned me out, and thus I learnt, after the fashion of Hippolytus [11] and Bellerophon,[12] the

[1] Adrien Tournèbe, known as Turnebus. Erudite writer of the Renaissance, b. at Les Andelys, 1512–65.

[2] Author of *De Arte Poetica*, 1484–1558.

[3] Protestant theologian, b. Metz, 1591–1669.

[4] Religious writer, b. Paris, 1640.

[5] Lawyer, 1549–1621.

[6] Historian, 1610–83.

[7] Jesuit historian, 1610–86.

[8] Protestant theologian, 1668–1736.

[9] Translator of a history of Tartary printed in Paris, 1529.

[10] He participated in the *Satire Ménippée*, a publication antagonistic to 'The League,' 1539–96.

[11] Son of Theseus, falsely accused by his stepmother, Phaedra.

[12] Falsely accused at the court of Proetus, King of Argos, by the Queen, Antaea.

wiles and wickedness of woman. Finding myself in the street, with my clothes and oratorical text-books, I ran great risk of dying of hunger there when, abandoning my clerical collar, I offered myself to a Huguenot gentleman, who took me as secretary, and dictated to me his pamphlets against religion.'

'Ah, there you did wrong!' cried my father. 'That was bad, Monsieur l'Abbé! An honest man should never lend a hand to such abominations. And for my part, ignorant as I am, and a mere workman, I cannot endure any taint of Colas's cow.' [1]

'You are right, mine host,' replied the Abbé. ''Tis the worst passage in my life, and the one that I repent the most. But my man was a Calvinist; he only employed me to write against the Lutherans and the Socinians,[2] whom he could not endure; and I assure you that he made me treat these heretics more harshly than the Sorbonne has ever done.'

'Amen!' said my father. 'Lambs feed in peace while the wolves devour one another.'

The Abbé continued his recital:

'For the matter of that, I did not remain long with that gentleman, who set more store on the letters of Ulrich von Hutten [3] than on the orations of Demosthenes, and in whose house one drank but water. After that I tried various trades, in none of which I succeeded. I was, in succession, pedlar, comedian, monk, and lackey. Then, donning my bands again, I became secretary to the Bishop of Séez, and edited the catalogue of precious manuscripts shut away in his library. The catalogue forms two volumes, in folio, which he has placed in his collection, gilt-edged, and bound in red morocco bearing his arms. I venture to say it is a good piece of work.

'It rested entirely with me whether I should grow old

[1] 'Il est de la vache à Colas' signified 'He is a Huguenot.' A strayed cow belonging to a peasant named Colas was ill-treated by a Huguenot neighbour. From this absurd squabble sprang popular riots and songs thereon.

[2] The followers of Laelius Socinus (Lelio Sozzini), a celebrated heresiarch, whose teaching was anti-trinitarian, 1525–62.

[3] Reformer in Germany, 1488–1523.

in the service of Monsignor in study and in peace. But I loved the maid of the steward's wife. Do not be too hard on me. Dark-skinned, full of life, fresh and plump, St Pachomius [1] himself must have loved her. One day she took coach, and went to seek her fortune in Paris. I followed her there, but I did not do as well for myself as she did. On her recommendation I entered the service of Madame de Saint-Ernest, a dancer at the Opera, who, knowing my particular talent, ordered me to write, under her prompting, a lampoon against Mademoiselle Davilliers, against whom she had a grudge. I was a good secretary, and well did I merit the fifty crowns which had been promised me. The book was printed at Amsterdam, by Marc-Michel Rey, with an allegorical frontispiece, and Mademoiselle Davilliers received the first copy at the very moment when she was going on the stage to sing the principal air in *Armide*. Rage made her voice hoarse and uncertain. She sang out of tune, and was hissed. Her part over, she ran in her powder and panniers to the Director of the King's Theatres, who could refuse her nothing. She flung herself at his feet in tears, and cried for vengeance. It was soon known that the stab came from Madame de Saint-Ernest.

'Questioned, pressed, menaced, she denounced me, and I was thrown into the Bastille, where I lay four years. I found some consolation in reading Boëthius and Cassiodorus.

'Since then I have kept a public writer's stall at the cemetery of the Holy Innocents, and have put at the disposal of amorous maidservants a pen which should rather portray the illustrious men of Rome, or annotate the writings of the Fathers. I get a farthing for a love-letter, and it is a trade by which I die rather than live. But I do not forget that Epictetus was a slave and Pyrrho a gardener.

'A moment ago, by great luck, I got a crown for an anonymous letter. It was two days since I had eaten anything. So I promptly went in search of an eating-house.

[1] Anchorite of the fourth century, the founder of the Coenobites of Egypt. For a picture of their life see *Thaïs* by Anatole France.

I saw from the street your illuminated sign, and the fire of your hearth, which flickered joyously on the pane. I smelt a delicious odour on the threshold. I entered. My good host, you now know my life.'

'I perceive that it is that of an honest man,' said my father, 'and, excepting the matter of heresy, there is nothing much to take amiss. Your hand. We are friends. What is your name?'

'Jérome Coignard, doctor of divinity, master of arts.'

III

THE wonderful thing in human affairs is the linking together of effects and causes. Monsieur Jérôme Coignard might well say so: when we come to consider the strange succession of incident and consequence wherein our destinies clash, we are bound to recognize that God in His perfection is not wanting in wit nor fancy, nor in the comic spirit; but, on the contrary, that He excels in imbroglio as in all else, and that after having inspired Moses, David, and the Prophets, if He had deigned to inspire Monsieur Le Sage and the playwrights of the booth, He could have dictated to them some very diverting harlequinades. Thus, for instance, I became a Latinist because Brother Ange was taken by the guard and put in the ecclesiastical prison for having knocked down a cutler in the arbour of the 'Petit Bacchus.' Monsieur Jérôme Coignard fulfilled his promise. He gave me lessons, and, finding me docile and intelligent, he took pleasure in teaching me ancient literature. In a few years he made me a fairly good Latinist.

I cherish his memory with a gratitude which will only end with my life. The obligation he laid me under may be conceived when I say that he left nothing undone that might help to shape my affections and my soul along with my intelligence. He would repeat to me the maxims of Epictetus, the homilies of St Basil, and Boëthius, his consolations. He explained to me, in many a fine passage, the philosophy of the Stoics; but he only displayed it in

its sublimity to abase it the lower before the philosophy of the Christian. He was a keen theologian and a good Catholic. His faith remained intact above the ruins of his fondest illusions and of his most rightful hopes. His weaknesses, his mistakes, and his faults—and he did not try to conceal them nor to lend them colouring—had not shaken his trust in divine goodness. And to understand him well you must realize that he took thought of his eternal welfare on occasions when he seemed apparently to care the least for it. He inculcated in me principles of enlightened piety. He exerted himself to apprentice me to virtue—to make it, so to speak, homely and familiar to me by examples drawn from the life of Zeno.[1]

That I might learn of the dangers of vice he drew his arguments from a source nearer to hand, confiding to me that, through having loved wine and women overmuch, he had had to renounce the honour of being raised to a collegiate chair, the long robe, and the doctor's cap.

To these exceptional merits he joined constancy and assiduity, and he gave his lessons with a punctuality that one would not have expected from a man given up, as he was, to every caprice of a wandering life, and driven about incessantly by the stresses of an existence less dignified than picaresque. This zeal was the result of his kind-heartedness, and also of the liking he had for our pleasant street, the rue Saint-Jacques, where he found the wherewithal to satisfy at once the desires of body and mind. Having given me some profitable lesson while enjoying a succulent dinner, he would go the round of the 'Petit Bacchus' and of the 'Image of St Catherine,' finding thus united in the little corner of earth, which was his paradise, a good wine and books.

He had become an assiduous visitor of Monsieur Blaizot, the bookseller, who always welcomed him, notwithstanding that he turned over the pages of all the books without ever buying one. And it was a wonderful sight to see my good master at the back of the shop, his nose poked into some little book new come from Holland, raising his head to hold forth according to the occasion

[1] Founder of the Stoic philosophy, died 264 B.C.

with the same smiling and overflowing knowledge, whether concerning the plans for universal monarchy attributed to the late king, or the amorous adventures of a financier and an actress. Monsieur Blaizot never tired of listening to him. This Monsieur Blaizot was a little dry old man, neat in his person, in maroon coat and breeches and grey worsted stockings. I admired him immensely, and I could think of nothing more delightful in the world than to sell books as he did at the 'Image of St Catherine.'

A certain memory helped to endue Monsieur Blaizot's shop for me with a mysterious charm. It was there that when very young I saw, for the first time, a woman unclothed. I see her still. It was Eve, in a pictured Bible. She had a round stomach and rather short legs, and she was conversing with the serpent in a Dutch landscape. The possessor of this print inspired me thenceforward with a consideration which showed no falling off when, thanks to Monsieur Coignard, I acquired the taste for books.

By the time I was sixteen I knew a good deal of Latin and a little Greek. Said my good master to my father:

'Do you not think, mine host, that it is improper that a young Ciceronian should still wear the clothes of a scullion?'

'I hadn't thought about it,' answered my father.

'It is very true,' said my mother, 'our son should have a dimity coat. He is pleasing in his appearance, he has good manners, and is well taught. He will do honour to his clothes.'

My father remained thoughtful for a minute, and then asked, would a dimity coat look well on a cook? But Abbé Coignard represented to him that, fostered by the Muses, I could never become a cook, and that the time was near when I should wear the clerical bands.

My father sighed when he thought that I should never, when he had gone, carry the banner of the Parisian Guild of Cooks.

And my mother's eyes shone with pride and joy at the thought of her son in the Church.

The first effect of my twill coat was to give me self-confidence and to encourage me to get a more exact notion of women than that given me once on a time by Monsieur

Blaizot's Eve. I thought, not unreasonably for the purpose, of Jeannette, the hurdy-gurdy player, and Catherine, the lace-maker, whom I saw pass the cook-shop twenty times a day, showing in wet weather a slim ankle and a little foot, whose tip skipped from paving-stone to stone. Jeannette was not as pretty as Catherine, neither was she so young nor so smart in her attire. She was a Savoyard, and wore a check kerchief tied under the chin, which hid her hair. But it must be said for her that she put on no airs and graces, and understood what was wanted of her even before one spoke. This quality suited my bashfulness down to the ground. One night in the porch of Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné, which is furnished with stone seats, she taught me what I did not know as yet, and what she had known for long enough. But I was not as grateful for it as I ought to have been, and I only longed to bring to the service of others who were prettier the knowledge she had instilled into me. I must say, as an excuse for my ingratitude, that Jeannette, the hurdy-gurdy player, put no greater price on her lessons than I myself had paid; and she was prodigal of her favours to every scamp in the neighbourhood.

Catherine had more reserve in her ways. I was much afraid of her, and did not dare tell her how pretty I thought her. What made me doubly shy was that she made fun of me continually, and lost no occasion to tease me. She made game of me on account of my chin. I blushed for it, and wished the earth would cover me. I assumed a dark and aggrieved air when I met her. I pretended to despise her, but, truth to tell, she was far too pretty for any such despite.

IV

That night, the night of the Epiphany and the nineteenth anniversary of my birth, while the heavens shed along with the melted snow a relentless cold which pierced one to the bone, and an icy wind set the sign of the 'Reine Pédauque' creaking, a clear fire, scented with goose-fat,

blazed in the cook-shop, and the soup tureen smoked on the cloth round which were seated Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, my father, and myself. My mother, as her habit was, was standing behind the master of the house, ready to serve.

He had already filled the Abbé's basin when, the door opening, we saw Brother Ange, very pale, his nose red, and his beard dripping. In his surprise my father raised his soup ladle nearly up to the smoked beams of the ceiling.

My father's surprise was easily explained. Brother Ange, who once before had disappeared for six months after knocking down the lame cutler, had this time stayed away two whole years without anything having been heard of him. He had gone away one spring with a donkey laden with relics, and the worst of the matter was that he had taken Catherine along with him, dressed as a Beguine. It was not known what had become of them, but there had been rumours at the 'Petit Bacchus' that the little brother and the little sister had come in conflict with the authorities between Tours and Orleans. Without counting that a curate of Saint-Benoît declared with much outcry that this gallows-thief of a Capuchin had stolen his donkey.

'What,' exclaimed my father, 'isn't this rascal in the deepest of dungeons? Then there is no longer justice in the kingdom.'

But Brother Ange repeated the *Benedicite* and made the sign of the cross over the soup tureen.

'Hallo, there!' my father went on. 'A truce to your grimaces, my fine monk! And now confess that you have spent in prison at least one of the two years that haven't seen your Beelzebub's face in the parish. The rue Saint-Jacques was the better for it, and the whole quarter more respectable. Look at him, the shameless fellow, who leads astray his neighbour's donkey and every man's hack!'

'Perhaps,' replied Brother Ange, his eyes downcast and his hands in his sleeves, 'Maître Léonard, you wish to refer to Catherine, whom I had the happiness to convert and to turn to a better life, so much so that she ardently longed to follow me along with the relics that I bore, and

to accompany me on blessed pilgrimages to the Black Virgin of Chartres? I agreed on condition that she should don a religious habit. Which she did without a murmur.'

'Hold your tongue,' said my father, 'you are a debauched rogue. You have no respect for your cloth. Go back whence you came, and go and look if you like, out in the street, whether the 'Reine Pédauque' has any chilblains.'

But my mother signed to the brother to sit down in the chimney corner, which he quietly did.

'We must forgive much to Capuchins, for they sin without ill intent,' said the Abbé.

My father begged Monsieur Coignard to talk no more of the brood, for their very name sent the blood to his head.

'Maître Léonard,' said the Abbé, 'philosophy is conducive to clemency. For my part I freely absolve ragamuffins, rogues, and all miscreants. And I bear no ill will even to the wealthy, though in their case there is much frowardness. And if you had mixed as I have done with people of repute, Maître Léonard, you would know they are worth no more than others, and they they are often less agreeable to meet. When I was with the Bishop of Séez I sat at the third table, and two attendants clad in black stood at my elbow: Constraint and Ennui.'

'It must be owned,' said my mother, 'that Monsignor's footmen bore tiresome names. Why didn't they call them Champagne, Olive, or Frontin,[1] according to custom?'

The Abbé continued:

'It is true that certain people easily accommodate themselves to the drawbacks of living among the great. At the second table of the Bishop of Séez sat a certain canon, a very polite man, who remained on a formal footing until the day of his death. Learning that he was extremely ill, Monsignor went to see him in his extremity. "Alas," said the canon, "I ask pardon of your grace for unavoidably dying in your presence." "Go on, go on, do not mind me," replied Monsignor kindly."'

At this moment my mother brought in the roast meat, which she placed on the table with a gesture so imbued

[1] A personage 'de l'ancienne comédie—valet effronté.'

with homely gravity that my father was quite moved, and cried out brusquely, his mouth full:

'Barbe, you are a saintly and worthy woman.'

'Madame,' said my good master, 'is indeed comparable to the virtuous woman of Holy Writ. She is a spouse such as God loves.'

'Thanks be to God,' said my mother, 'I have never failed in the fidelity I swore to my husband, Léonard Ménétrier, and now that the worst is over assuredly I reckon on not failing in it until the hour of my death. I only wish that he had been as faithful to me as I to him.'

'Madame, I knew at first sight that you were a good woman,' the Abbé ran on, 'for I feel in your presence a peace which is more of heaven than earth.'

My mother, who was simple but not foolish, well understood what he meant, and answered that had he but known her twenty years before he would have found her very different from what she had become in this cook-shop where her good looks had been lost under the fiery heat of the spit and the steam from the smoking bowls. And now being roused, she related how the baker at Auneau found her sufficiently to his taste to offer her cakes every time she passed his bakehouse. She added, with spirit, that for the matter of that there is neither maid nor woman so ugly but that she can do wrong if the fancy take her.

'The good woman is right,' said my father. 'I remember when I was apprenticed at the cook-shop of the 'Oie Royale,' near the Saint-Denis gate, my master, who was in those days banner-bearer to the guild, as I am now, saying to me: "I shall never be cuckold, my wife is too ugly." This speech gave me the notion of doing what he thought impossible. I succeeded at the first attempt, one morning when he was at La Vallée. He spoke truth: his wife was very plain, but not without wit, and she was not without gratitude.'

At this anecdote my mother lost her temper altogether, saying that that was not the kind of talk a father of a family should indulge in with his wife and son if he wished to keep their respect. Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, seeing

her quite red with anger, turned the conversation with adroit kindliness, suddenly putting a question to Brother Ange who, his hands in his sleeves, was sitting humbly in the chimney corner:

'Little brother,' he said, 'what relics did you and Catherine carry on the curate's donkey? It was your breeches, wasn't it, you gave to the devotees to kiss, like the Franciscan in the tale told by Henri Estienne?'[1]

'Ah, Monsieur l'Abbé,' replied Brother Ange, with the air of a martyr suffering for the truth, 'it was not my breeches but a foot of St Eustace.'

'I would have sworn it, were swearing not a sin,' cried the Abbé, waving a drumstick. 'These Capuchins ferret you out saints that good writers of Church history know nothing of. Neither Tillemont[2] nor Fleury[3] mentions this St Eustace, to whom it was exceedingly wrong to dedicate a church in Paris, when there were so many saints acknowledged by writers worthy of belief who still await such an honour. The life of this Eustatius is a tissue of ridiculous fables. The same may be said of that of St Catherine, who never existed save in the imagination of some worthless Byzantine monk. I will not be too severe upon her, though, for she is the patron saint of writers and serves for a sign at good Monsieur Blaizot's shop, which is the most delectable spot in the world.'

'I had also,' went on the little brother imperturbably, 'a rib of St Mary of Egypt.'

'Oh, oh, as to her,' cried the Abbé, throwing his bone across the room, 'I rate her as a great saint, for in her life she gave a beautiful example of humility! You know, madame,' he added, pulling my mother by the sleeve, 'that St Mary of Egypt making a pilgrimage to the tomb of our Saviour was stopped by a deep river and, not having a farthing wherewith to pay the ferry boat, she offered her body in payment to the boatmen. What do you say to that, my good lady?'

My mother first asked whether the story was really true. When she was assured that it was printed in books

[1] Lexicographer, 1531–98.
[2] Historian, b. Paris, 1637–98. [3] Ecclesiastical historian, 1640–1723.

and painted on a window in the church of La Jussienne, she held it for true.

'I think,' she said, 'that one would need be as great a saint as she to do as much without sinning. As for me, I would not risk it.'

'For my part,' said the Abbé, 'in accordance with the more subtle theologians, I approve the conduct of this saint. She is a lesson to honest women who entrench themselves too overweeningly in the pride of their virtue. There is a certain sensuality, when one thinks about it, in putting such a very high value on the flesh, and in guarding with such exceeding care what one ought to disdain. One sees matrons who think they have in themselves a treasure to protect, and who visibly exaggerate the interest taken in their person by God and the angels. They believe themselves a sort of natural Blessed Sacrament. St Mary of Egypt knew better. Although pretty and ravishingly well made, she judged that there would be too much pride of the flesh in stopping on her blessed pilgrimage for a thing indifferent in itself, and which, far from being a precious jewel, is but an occasion for mortification. She suffered mortification, madame, and in this manner with admirable humility she entered on the path of penitence, where she accomplished marvellous things.'

'Monsieur l'Abbé,' said my mother, 'I fail to understand you. You are too learned for me.'

'This great saint,' said Brother Ange, 'is painted lifelike in my convent chapel, and all her body is covered, by God's grace, with long, thick hair. Copies of it are made, and I will bring you one which has been blessed, my good lady.'

My mother, touched, passed him the soup tureen behind the master's back. And the good brother, sitting over the ashes, dipped his beard in the savoury-smelling soup.

'Now is the time,' said my father, 'to uncork one of those bottles which I hold in reserve for great feast days such as Christmas, Twelfth Night, and the feast of St Lawrence;[1] nothing is more pleasing than to drink good wine when one is quietly at home, sheltered from all intruders.'

[1] The church of St Lawrence in Paris had a popular fête, but the fair held against the church walls was still more celebrated.

He had scarcely pronounced these words when the door opened and a big man invaded the cook-shop in a squall of wind and snow. 'A salamander! a salamander!' he cried, and without taking notice of any one, he leant over the hearth and stirred the fire with his stick, to the great annoyance of Brother Ange who, swallowing cinders and smuts in his soup, coughed till he nearly gave up the ghost. And the big man stirred the fire again, crying: 'A salamander! I see a salamander!' till the troubled flame made his shadow waver on the ceiling in the shape of some great bird of prey.

My father was surprised, and even shocked, at the ways of this visitor. But he knew how to control himself. He got up, his napkin under his arm, and approaching the chimney corner he bent over the hearth, his hands on his hips.

When he had sufficiently considered his fire all scattered and Brother Ange covered with ashes, he said:

'If your excellency will pardon me, I see but a worthless monk and no salamander.

'And after all I do not regret it,' my father added. 'For, from all I have heard, it is an ugly beast, hairy and horned and with great claws.'

'What a mistake!' replied the dark man. 'Salamanders are like women, or, rather, like nymphs, for they are of a perfect beauty. But it was silly of me to ask if you could see this one. One must be a philosopher to see a salamander and I should scarcely think that there are any philosophers in this kitchen.'

'Possibly you are mistaken,' said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard. 'I am a doctor of divinty and master of arts; I have studied to some extent the Greek and Latin moralists, whose maxims have fortified my soul in the vicissitudes of my life, and particularly have I applied Boëthius as a local application for the evils of existence. And behold by my side Jacobus Tournebroche, my pupil, who knows by heart the aphorisms of Publius Syrus.'

The unknown turned on the Abbé his yellow eyes, which shone strangely over his eagle nose, and excused himself, with more politeness than his fierce looks gave promise

of, for not having immediately recognized a person of his merit.

'It is extremely probable,' he added, 'that this salamander has come for you or for your pupil. I saw her very plainly from the street, when passing the shop. She would have been more apparent if the fire had been brighter. That is why one should stir the fire vigorously when one thinks there is a salamander in the chimney.'

At the first movement that the unknown made to stir the coals, Brother Ange, in his anxiety, covered his soup with a corner of his gown and shut his eyes.

'Monsieur,' pursued the salamander-seeking gentleman, 'allow your young pupil to approach the hearth, and tell us if he cannot see some resemblance to a woman above the flames.'

Just then, the smoke which went up under the hood of the chimney curled into a marked grace, making curves which might have been said to simulate a sinuous body had one's attention been on the strain. I was not altogether fibbing, therefore, when I said that I could, perhaps, see something.

I had scarcely said so when the unknown, raising his abnormally long arm, struck me on the shoulder so roughly with his fist that I thought he must have broken my collar-bone.

Thereon, in a very gentle voice, he said, looking upon me in the mean while with a benevolent air:

'My child, it was necessary to make this strong impression on you that you may never forget that you have seen a salamander. 'Tis a sign that you are destined to become a learned man, perhaps a magian. Your face, moreover, augurs well for your intelligence.'

'Monsieur,' said my mother, 'he learns everything quite easily, and please God he will yet be an Abbé.'

Monsieur Jérôme Coignard added that I had drawn some profit from his lessons, and my father asked the stranger if he would not have something to eat.

'I have no need to eat,' said the man, 'and it is easy for me to go for a year and even more without food, with the exception of a certain elixir, whose composition is known

only to the philosophers. This faculty is not peculiar to me. It is common to all the elect, and we know that the illustrious Cardan abstained from all food for several years without being inconvenienced. On the contrary, his mind gained during that time a rare sharpness. At the same time I will eat of what you may offer me solely to do your pleasure.'

And he took a seat without ceremony at our table. At the same time Brother Ange silently pushed a stool between my chair and my master's, and slipped into position to receive his share of the partridge pasty that my mother had just served up.

The philosopher having thrown his cloak over the back of his chair, we perceived the diamond buttons in his coat. He sat there dreamily. The shadow of his nose shaded his mouth, and his fallen cheeks sank into his jaw. His gloomy mood affected us all.

My good master himself drank in silence. The only sound one heard was the little brother chewing his pasty.

Suddenly the philosopher said:

'The more I think of it the more persuaded I am that this salamander came for this young man.'

And he pointed at me with his knife.

'Monsieur,' I answered him, 'if salamanders are really such as you say, this one does me great honour, and I am much obliged to her. But truth to tell, I rather guessed at her than saw her, and this first meeting has aroused my curiosity without satisfying it.'

My good master was choking with the desire to speak his mind.

'Monsieur,' he burst out all at once to the philosopher, 'I am fifty-one years of age; I am master of arts and doctor of theology; I have read all the Greek and Latin authors who have survived the injury done by time and the evil done by man, and I have never seen a salamander, whence I reasonably conclude that no such thing exists.'

'Excuse me,' said Brother Ange, half choked with partridge and with fright. 'But unhappily salamanders do exist. And a Jesuit father, whose name I forget, has written a treatise on these apparitions. I myself saw, in a

place called Saint-Claude, in the house of some villagers, a salamander in a chimney corner, right up against the stock-pot. She had a cat's head, a toad's body, and a fish's tail. I threw a potful of holy water over the beast and she immediately vanished into thin air with a fearful frizzling noise, and in the midst of an exceedingly acrid smoke which all but burnt my eyes out. And what I tell you is so true that for at least a whole week my beard smelt of burning, which proves more than all the rest the malign nature of this beast.'

'You are making fun of us, little brother,' said the Abbé, 'your toad with a cat's head is no more real than the nymph of this gentleman here. And, moreover, it is a disgusting invention.'

The philosopher began to laugh.

'Brother Ange has not been allowed,' he said, 'to see the salamanders as known to the wise. When the nymphs of the fire see Capuchins they turn their backs on them.'

'Oh, oh,' said my father, laughing loudly, 'even a nymph's back is too good for a Capuchin.'

And, as he was in a good temper, he passed a huge slice of pasty to the little brother.

My mother placed the roast meat in the middle of the table and took the opportunity of asking whether the salamanders were good Christians, which she much doubted, having never heard that those who dwelt in fire praised the Lord.

'Madame,' replied the Abbé, 'many theologians of the Society of Jesus have acknowledged the existence of a whole race of incubi and succubi, who are not demons, properly speaking, because they do not allow themselves to be put to rout by a sprinkling of holy water, and who do not belong to the Church triumphant, for spirits of glory would never have tried to seduce a baker's wife, as happened at Pérouse. But, if you want my opinion, these are rather the unclean imaginings of a canting humbug than the views of a divine. We should abhor these ridiculous bedevilments and deplore that sons of the Church, born in the light, should form a less sublime idea of the world and of God than did a Plato or a Cicero in the darkness of paganism. God, I venture to say, is more

present in *Scipio's Dream* than in those dark treatises on demonology, whose authors pronounce themselves to be Christians and Catholics.'

'Monsieur l'Abbé, mind what you say,' said the philosopher. 'Your Cicero spoke fluently and easily, but his was a commonplace mind, and he was not far advanced in the sacred sciences. Have you ever heard speak of Hermes Trismegistus [1] and the *Emerald Table*?' [2]

'Monsieur,' said the Abbé, 'I found a very ancient manuscript of the *Emerald Table* in the library of the Bishop of Séez, and I would have deciphered it sooner or later had not the maid of the steward's wife fled to Paris to seek her fortune and made me climb into the coach with her. There was no sorcery in that, Master Philosopher, and the charms that worked upon her were those of nature:

Non facit hoc verbis: facie tenerisque lacertis
Devovet et flavis nostra puella comis.'

'It is one more proof,' said the philosopher, 'that women are great enemies of knowledge, and so the wise man should keep himself from all dealings with them.'

'Even in lawful marriage?' asked my father.

'Above all in lawful marriage,' replied the philosopher.

'Alas, what is left for your poor wise men when they are disposed to relax a little?' asked my father.

The philosopher replied:

'The salamanders are left to them.'

At these words Brother Ange raised a terrified nose above his plate.

'Do not speak thus, my good monsieur,' he murmured, 'in the name of all the saints of my Order, do not say such things! And do not lose sight of the fact that a salamander is no other than the devil, who, as one knows, clothes himself in divers forms, sometimes pleasing, when he succeeds in disguising his natural ugliness, at other times hideous, when he lets his true nature be seen.'

[1] Greek designation of Thoth, the Egyptian god of wisdom. To him was attributed the authorship of the sacred books generally called hermetic.

[2] *Table d'Émeraude.* The *Tabula Smaragdina*—work of Hermes Trismegistus.

'It is for you to mind what you say, Brother Ange,' replied the philosopher, 'and since you fear the devil, do not anger him too much nor excite him by ill-considered speeches. You know that the Old Enemy, the Spirit that denies, still holds such power in the spiritual world that even God must reckon with him. I will go further: that God, who fears him, has made him His steward. Beware, little brother, beware! They understand one another!'

On hearing this speech, the poor Capuchin thought he heard and saw the devil in person, whom the unknown precisely resembled, with his fiery eyes, his hooked nose, his dark skin, and the whole of his long thin person. His wits, already confounded, were finally overwhelmed by pious terror. Feeling himself in the grip of the Evil One, he began to tremble in every limb, slipped into his pocket all the good scraps he could collect, got up very quietly, and made for the door, moving backwards, and murmuring exorcisms.

The philosopher took no notice of him. He pulled from his coat a little dog's-eared parchment-covered book, which he held out open to my good master and me. It was an old Greek text, full of abbreviations and linked letters, which at first sight looked to me like a volume of nonsense. But Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, once he had donned his spectacles and held out the book at a right distance, began to read easily these characters, more like skeins of thread tangled by a cat's claws than the plain and steady lettering of my St John Chrysostom, where I learnt the tongue of Plato and the Gospel. When he had finished his reading he said:

'Monsieur, this passage is to be understood in this way: "'Among the Egyptians, the instructed learn first of all the letters which are called epistolographic; secondly, the hieratic, which the hierogrammats use, and lastly, the hieroglyphic."'

Then, pulling off his spectacles and waving them with an air of triumph:

'Ha, ha! Master Philosopher,' he added, 'you don't catch me tripping. This is taken from the first book of the *Stromata*, whose author, Clement of Alexandria,[1] is

[1] Father of the Church, d. *circa* 220.

not inscribed in the martyrology, for divers reasons, learnedly set forth by His Holiness Benedict XI, the principal of which is that this father frequently erred in matters of faith. This exclusion should not trouble him much, if you consider with what philosophic detachment he regarded martyrdom during his life. He preferred exile, and took care to spare the crime to his persecutors, for he was a very good man. He wrote with elegance, had a lively talent, his morals were unimpeachable, and even austere. He had an excessive fondness for allegories and for lettuce.'

The philosopher stretched an arm, which elongated itself prodigiously, at least to me it seemed so, crossed the whole length of the table, to recover the book from the hands of my learned master.

'Enough,' he said, replacing the *Stromata* in his pocket. 'I see that you understand Greek. You have rendered the passage well enough, at any rate, in its vulgar and literal sense. I will make your fortune and that of your pupil. I shall employ you both in my house in translating Greek texts sent to me from Egypt.' And turning to my father:

'I imagine, mine host, that you will consent to let me have your son that I may make a learned man and a good man of him. If it is too much to ask of your paternal affection to give him up altogether, I will maintain at my expense a scullion to take his place in your cook-shop.'

'Since your excellency thus arranges it,' replied my father, 'I will not stand in the way of your benefiting my son.'

'On the condition,' said my mother, 'that it shall not be at the cost of his soul? You must swear to me, monsieur, that you are a good Christian.'

'Barbe,' said my father, 'you are a saintly and worthy woman, but you force me to make excuses to his excellency for your want of manners, which comes less, truth to tell, from your disposition, which is good enough, than from your neglected education.'

'Let the good woman speak,' said the philosopher, 'and let her make her mind easy, I am a very religious man.'

'That is a good thing,' said my mother. 'We must worship the holy name of God.'

'I worship all His names, my good woman, for He has many. He is called Adonai, Tetragrammaton, Jehovah, Theos, Athanatos, and Ischyros, and many others.'

'I didn't know anything about that,' said my mother, 'but I am not surprised at what you tell me, monsieur, for I have noticed that people of quality have many more names than common people. I come from Auneau, near the town of Chartres, and I was quite small when the lord of the manor passed from this world to the next; now I well remember how when the herald cried the death of the deceased seigneur he gave him nearly as many names as are to be found in the litany of saints. I readily believe that God has more names than had the seigneur of Auneau, because he has a still higher position. Educated people are very lucky to know them all. And if you help my son Jacques to advance in this knowledge I shall be very much obliged to you, monsieur.'

'Then that matter is settled,' said the philosopher. 'And as to you, Monsieur l'Abbé, you will not be averse to translating from the Greek—in consideration of a salary, be it understood.'

My good master, who for some moments past had been trying to collect those few wits which were not already hopelessly bemused with the fumes of wine, filled his goblet, rose up, and said:

'Master philosopher, with my whole heart I accept your generous offer. You are a magnificent being. I am honoured, monsieur, to be in your service. Of furniture, there are two pieces I hold high in esteem, the bed and the board. The board, which laden, turn by turn about, with learned books and succulent dishes, serves to support the nourishment of body and mind; the bed, propitious to the sweets of repose as to the torments of love. It was surely an inspired man who gave to the sons of Deucalion the bed and the board. If I find at your house, monsieur, these two precious pieces of furniture, I will sound your name, as that of my benefactor, in eternal praise, and I will celebrate you in Greek and Latin verse of divers metres.'

Thus he spoke, and drank a great gulp of wine.

'That is all right, then,' replied the philosopher. 'I shall expect you both to-morrow morning at my house. You must follow the road to Saint-Germain as far as the Cross of Les Sablons. From the foot of this cross reckon a hundred paces going west and you will find a small green door in a garden wall. Raise the knocker, which is in the shape of a veiled figure, its finger on its lips. You must ask the old man who opens the door for Monsieur d'Astarac.'

'My son,' said my good master, pulling me by the sleeve, 'keep all this in your memory, cross, knocker, and all the rest, so that we may be able to-morrow to find this gate of fortune. And you, Monsieur Maecenas——'

But the philosopher had already disappeared without any one having seen him go.

V

THE next day we fared early, my master and I, along the road to Saint-Germain. The snow which covered the ground, under the reddish light from the sky, made the atmosphere dead and still. The road was deserted. We walked in great cart ruts between the walls of market-gardens, tumbledown palings, and low houses whose windows watched us with suspicious eye. Then, having left behind us two or three broken-down hovels of wattle and daub, we saw, in the midst of a desolate common, the Cross of Les Sablons. Fifty paces beyond was the beginning of an immense park enclosed by a ruined wall. This wall was pierced by a small green door whose knocker was in the shape of a horrible face, its finger on its lips. We readily recognized it for that which the philosopher had described to us, and lifted it and knocked.

After a considerable time, an old serving-man came and let us in and signed to us to follow him across a deserted park. Statues of nymphs, which had witnessed the youth of the late king, hid under ivy their melancholy and their scars. At the end of the walk, whose ditches were masked

with snow, rose a mansion of brick and stone, which was as gloomy as the château of Madrid, its neighbour, and which, topped by a roof of slate, all awry, seemed the very castle of the Sleeping Beauty.

While we followed the steps of the uncommunicative serving-man, the Abbé said in my ear:

'I confess to you, my son, that the dwelling does not seem attractive. It bears witness to the rude condition of French manners still in force at the time of Henry IV, and it induces depression and even melancholy in the mind by the state of neglect into which it has been allowed to lapse. How far sweeter would it be to mount the enchanting slopes of Tusculum, in the hope of hearing Cicero discourse on virtue under the pines and terebinths of his villa, dear to philosophers. And have you not noticed, my son, that we did not pass a single inn or hostelry of any sort on the road and that it is necessary to cross the bridge and climb the hill as far as the crossing of the avenues of Les Bergères, to drink a glass of wine? It is true that there is the inn at the sign of the 'Cheval-Rouge' where I remember Madame de Saint-Ernest taking me once to dine, along with her monkey and her lover. You cannot imagine, Tournebroche, what good cheer is to be had there. The 'Cheval-Rouge' is as renowned for its lunches as for the number of its horses and its posting facilities. I assured myself of that while pursuing into the stables a certain maidservant who seemed to me to be pretty. But she was not so; one might more justly have called her ugly. I lent her the illumination of my amorous fancy. Such is the state of men given over to themselves: piteous are their mistakes. We are abused by vain images, we follow dreams, and we embrace shadows. In God alone is truth and steadfastness.'

Meanwhile, following the old servant, we climbed the disjointed steps of the terrace.

'Alas,' said the Abbé in my ear, 'I begin to regret your good father's cook-shop, where we ate many a choice morsel, expounding Quintilian the while.'

Having scaled the first flight of a large stone staircase, we were ushered into a room where Monsieur d'Astarac

was busy writing near a big fire, surrounded by Egyptian coffins of human form, ranged against the wall, their cases painted with sacred emblems, and their faces in gold, with long, shining eyes.

Monsieur d'Astarac invited us politely to sit down, and said:

'Messieurs, I was expecting you, and since you are both good enough to render me the favour of your services I beg you to consider this house as yours. You will be occupied here in translating Greek texts which I have brought back from Egypt. I have no doubt that you will put all your zeal into the accomplishment of this labour, when you learn that it concerns the work I have undertaken, which is to rediscover the lost knowledge whereby man shall be re-established in his original authority over the elements. Though I have no intention to-day of lifting from your eyes the veil of nature, and of showing you Isis in all her dazzling nudity, I will confide to you the object of my studies without fear that you should betray the mystery, for I rely on your probity, and also on the power that I have of divining and of preventing anything that may be attempted against me, and of disposing of terrible and secret forces to avenge myself. In default of a fidelity which I do not question, my powers, messieurs, assure me of your silence, and I risk nothing in exposing myself to you. You must know that man came from the hands of Jehovah perfect in the knowledge he has since lost. At his birth he had great power and great wisdom. One sees it in the book of Moses. Yet it is needful to understand it. First of all, it is clear that Jehovah is not God, but a mighty demon, for he created the world. The idea of a God at one and the same time a creator and perfect is but a Gothic fancy, a barbarism fit for a Celt or a Saxon. One cannot admit, however little one's intelligence may be formed, that a perfect being can add anything whatever to his perfection, were it but a hazel-nut. That stands to reason. God can have no conception. For, being infinite, what can He well conceive? He does not create, for He is beyond time and space, conditions necessary to any construction. Moses

was too good a philosopher to teach that the world was created by God. He knew Jehovah for what he is in reality, namely for a mighty demon, and, to give him the name, for the demiurge. Now, when Jehovah created man, he gave him the knowledge of the visible and invisible worlds. The fall of Adam and Eve, which I will one day explain to you, did not altogether destroy this knowledge in the first man and the first woman, whose doctrines descended to their children. These doctrines, on which lordship over nature depends, were transcribed in the book of Enoch. The Egyptian priests kept the tradition, which they fixed in mysterious signs on the walls of temples and on the coffins of the dead. Moses, brought up in the sanctuary of Memphis, was one of the initiated. His books, to the number of five or even six, enclose, like so many precious arks, the treasures of divine knowledge. One finds in them the noblest of secrets, if after having purged them of unworthy interpolations one is careful to disdain the gross and literal meaning to follow but the more subtle, which I have in great measure penetrated to, as will be made plain to you later on. However, the truths guarded, as carefully as virgins, in the temples of Egypt, passed to the sages of Alexandria, who added further to them, and crowned them with all the pure gold left as a legacy to Greece by Pythagoras and his disciples, with whom the powers of air held familiar converse. Therefore, messieurs, we must explore the books of the Hebrews, the hieroglyphics of the Egyptians, and the treatises of those Greeks whom they call Gnostics, because they had knowledge. For myself, as is only just, I have reserved the most arduous part of this great labour. I devote myself to deciphering the hieroglyphics that the Egyptians inscribed in the temples of their gods and on the tombs of the priests. Having brought back from Egypt many of these inscriptions, I am getting at their meaning with the help of the key that I have been able to find in the writings of Clement of Alexandria.

'The Rabbi Mosaïde, who lives a retired life under my roof, labours to re-establish the true meaning of the Pentateuch. He is an old man, deeply versed in magic,

who lived for seventeen years shut up in the crypts of the Great Pyramid, where he read the works of Thoth. As for you, messieurs, I count on employing your knowledge to read the Alexandrine manuscripts which I have myself collected in large numbers. Doubtless you will find marvellous secrets in them, and I have no fear but that with the help of these three sources of enlightenment, the Egyptian, the Hebraic, and the Greek, I shall soon arrive at possession of the means still lacking to me of ruling absolutely over nature both visible and invisible.

'Rest assured that I shall acknowledge your services by allowing you to participate to some extent in my powers.

'I do not speak to you of a more vulgar method of acknowledgment. At the point I have reached in my philosophic work money is but a mere trifle.'

When Monsieur d'Astarac got to this point of his speech, my good master interrupted him.

'Monsieur,' he said, 'I will not conceal from you that this money, which seems but a trifle to you, is for me a burning anxiety, for I have experienced that it is not easy to gain it honestly or even otherwise. I shall therefore be grateful for any assurance you may give me on this subject.'

Monsieur d'Astarac, with a gesture which seemed to sweep aside some invisible object, reassured Monsieur Jérôme Coignard. As for me, curious of all I saw, I only wished to begin my new life.

At his master's call, the old serving-man who had opened the door appeared in the study.

'Messieurs,' continued our host, 'I give you your liberty until the midday meal. I shall be much obliged to you, however, if you will go and see the rooms prepared for you upstairs, and tell me if anything be wanting. Crito will show you the way.'

After having made sure that we were following him, the silent Crito left the room and began to mount the stairs. He climbed to the very top. Then going a few steps down a long corridor, he showed us two very neat rooms where a good fire was burning. I should never have believed that a house outwardly in such a ruined state and

whose front showed but cracked walls and blind windows could in some parts be so habitable. My first care was to find out where I was. Our rooms looked on to fields, and the view, over the marshy banks of the Seine, spread as far as the Calvary of Mont Valérien.

On taking a look at our furniture, I saw, laid out on the bed, a grey coat, breeches to match, a hat, and a sword. On the carpet, a pair of buckled shoes stood genteelly paired, heels together, toes apart, as if they had an innate appreciation of gallant bearing.

I augured favourably from all this of our master's liberality. To do him honour I took great pains over my toilet, and I powdered my hair freely with powder, of which I found a boxful on a little table. I found, in a drawer of the chest of drawers, a lace shirt and white stockings—all in keeping.

Having clad myself in the shirt, stockings, breeches, coat, and waistcoat, I set about walking up and down the room, the hat under my arm, my hand on the hilt of my sword, stopping every moment to lean over the mirror, and regretting that Catherine, the lace-maker, could not see me thus gallantly equipped.

I had gone through this little performance several times when Monsieur Jérôme Coignard came into my room with new bands and a very respectable clerical collar.

'Is it you, Tournebroche, my son?' he exclaimed. 'Never forget that you owe these fine clothes to the knowledge that I have instilled into you. They suit a humanist such as you are, for where we speak of the *humanities* it is as much as to say ornaments. But look at me, I beg of you, and tell me, do I not look well? In this coat I feel that I am a man of worthy repute. This Monsieur d'Astarac is of a magnificent turn. 'Tis a pity that he is mad. But he is at least sane on one point—for he calls his manservant Crito, that is to say, judge. And it is true indeed that our servants are the witnesses of our every action. They are sometimes their instigation. When Lord Verulam, Chancellor of England, whose philosophy is not much to my taste, but who was a learned man, entered the Upper House to stand his trial, his lackeys, clad with a sumptuousness

that gave evidence of the display exhibited by the chancellor in the conduct of his household, rose as a mark of respect. But Lord Verulam said to them: "Be seated! Your aggrandizement has brought me low." In reality, these rogues had by their extravagance helped towards his ruin and constrained him to acts for which he was indicted for corruption. Tournebroche, my son, may the example of Lord Verulam, Chancellor of England, and author of the *Novum Organum*, be always before your eyes. But to return to this Seigneur d'Astarac, in whose service we are, it is a great pity that he is a sorcerer and given over to evil knowledge. You know, my son, that I pride myself on my niceness in matters of faith. It costs me something to take service with a cabbalist, who turns our sacred writings upside down, on the pretext of understanding them better so. All the same, if, as his name and his speech seem to indicate, he is a gentleman of Gascony, we have nothing to fear. A Gascon can make pact with the devil, for you may be sure that it is the devil who will be duped.'

The bell for our midday dinner interrupted our talk.

'Tournebroche, my son,' said my master, going downstairs, 'remember during the meal to follow all my movements, so that you may imitate them. Having eaten at the third table of the Bishop of Séez I know how to behave myself. It is a difficult art. It is less easy to eat like a gentleman than to speak like one.'

VI

In the dining-room we found the table laid for three, where Monsieur d'Astarac made us sit down. Crito, who discharged the duties of butler, served us with jellies, extracts, and *purées* passed a dozen times through the sieve. We saw no roast joint appear. Though we were very careful to hide our surprise, my good master and I, Monsieur d'Astarac perceived it, and said to us:

'Messieurs, this is only an experiment, and if it seems an

unfortunate one to you I will not persist in it. You shall be served with more ordinary dishes, and I myself will not disdain to partake. If the dishes that I offer you to-day are badly prepared, it is less the fault of my cook than that of the science of chemistry, which is yet in its infancy. All the same, this will give you some notion of what we shall see in the future. At present men eat without philosophy. They do not feed like reasonable beings. They do not even think about it. But what do they think about? They nearly all live in a state of stupidity, and even such as are capable of reflection occupy their mind with follies, such as controversy and the making of poetry. Consider, messieurs, the subject of man and his food since the distant times when they ceased all commerce with sylphs and salamanders. Abandoned by the genii of the air, they sank into ignorance and barbarism. Without art and without governance, they lived naked and miserable in caves, on the banks of streams, or in the trees of the forests. The chase was their only pursuit. When by surprise or superior swiftness they took some timid animal, they devoured their prey while it was yet quivering.

'Moreover, they ate the flesh of their companions, and of their weakly brethren, and the first sepulchres of humanity were living tombs, were bowels, famished and without compassion. After long and savage centuries, appeared a divine man whom the Greeks called Prometheus. There is no doubt that this sage had commerce with the race of salamanders, in the secret resorts of the nymphs. He learnt from them, and taught to poor mortals, the art of kindling and keeping alight the fire. Among the innumerable gains which mankind has derived from this divine gift, one of the happiest was to be able to cook food, and by this treatment to render it lighter and less gross. And it is in great measure as a result of their nourishment being submitted to the action of fire that men have slowly and by degrees become intelligent, industrious, reflective, and fitted to cultivate the arts and sciences. But this was but the first step, and it is distressing to think that so many millions of years have rolled by without there

having been a second. Since the time when our ancestors broiled a bear's ham over a brushwood fire, under the shelter of a rock, we have made no real progress in cookery. For you will scarcely reckon as anything the inventions of Lucullus, and that heavy pasty to which Vitellius gave the name of Buckler of Minerva, any more than our roasts, our patties, our stews, our stuffed meats, and all those made dishes which still retain much of the old barbarity.

'The king's table at Fontainebleau, where they dress a whole stag in his skin, and with his antlers, presents to the eyes of a philosopher as gross a spectacle as that of the troglodytes crouching round the fire gnawing horse bones. The gay pictures on the walls, the guards, the richly dressed officers, the musicians playing airs from Lambert and Lulli [1] in the gallery, the silken cloths, the silver service, the cups of gold, the Venetian glass, the sconces, the chased epergnes decked with flowers, all these fail to deceive or to cast a charm which shall hide the true nature of this unclean charnel-house, where men and women meet to feast greedily on the carcasses of beasts, on broken bones and torn flesh. What an unphilosophic repast! We swallow with stupid greed muscles, fat, and entrails of animals, without making any distinction in these substances between the parts which are really suitable for our nourishment and those, far more plentiful, which should be thrown away; and we bolt without distinction the good and the bad, the useful and the hurtful. This is, however, where we should make a distinction, and if, in all the faculty, a single doctor of chemistry and philosopher could be found, we should no longer be obliged to sit down to these disgusting orgies.

'He would prepare for us, messieurs, extracts of meat, containing merely what is in sympathy and affinity with our bodies. Only the quintessence of beef and swine-flesh would be taken, merely the elixir of partridges and pullets, and everything that one swallowed could be digested. It is what I do not despair of succeeding in doing one day, messieurs, in dwelling more on the study of

[1] Lulli, 1632–87. Born at Florence. Settled at court of Louis XIV. Created opera at Paris.

medicine and chemistry than I have hitherto had the time to do.'

At these words from our host Monsieur Jérôme Coignard lifted his eyes from the Spartan broth on his plate, and looked uneasily at Monsieur d'Astarac.

'Even so our progress would still be inadequate,' continued the latter. 'An honest man cannot without disgust eat the flesh of animals, and nations cannot call themselves civilized so long as slaughter-houses and butchers' shops are to be found in their towns. But one day we shall know how to rid ourselves of these barbarous trades. When we know exactly the nutrient substances which are contained in the bodies of animals, it will become possible to draw these same substances out of the lifeless bodies, which will supply them abundantly. These bodies really contain all that is found in living beings, since the animal is formed from the vegetable, which in its turn has drawn its substance from lifeless matter.

'The next thing will be to nourish ourselves on extracts of metals and minerals suitably prepared by physicians. Have no fear but that the taste will be delicious and the absorption wholesome. Cooking will be done in retorts, and in alembics, and we shall have alchemists as master-cooks. Are you not exceedingly anxious, messieurs, to see these marvels? I promise you them in time to come. But you cannot yet grasp the excellent results they will effect.'

'Truly, monsieur, I fail to grasp them,' said my good master, taking a drink of wine.

'Deign, in that case, to listen to me a moment,' said Monsieur d'Astarac. 'Being no longer weighed down by slow processes of digestion, men will become singularly agile, their sight will become wonderfully keen, and they will see ships gliding on the seas of the moon. Their understanding will be clearer, their manners will soften. They will advance greatly in the knowledge of God and nature. But one must face the changes which will not fail to be produced. Even the structure of the human body will be modified. It is a fact that for the want of use organs dwindle and even end by disappearing. It has

been observed that fish deprived of light become blind; and in Valais I have seen shepherds who, living only on curds and whey, lost their teeth very early; some amongst them never even had any. One cannot but admire nature in that particular; she suffers nothing useless to exist. When mankind feeds but on the infusions I have described, the intestines will not fail to become shorter by several ells, and the size of the stomach will be considerably diminished.'

'Upon my word,' said my good master, 'you go too fast, monsieur, and risk making a bad job of it! It has never vexed me that women should have a little of that, so long as the rest was in proportion. It is a beauty which appeals to me. Do not inconsiderately prune it away.'

'Well, never mind about that. We will leave women's waists and hips to shape themselves according to the canon of the Greek sculptors. That will be to please you, Monsieur l'Abbé, and in consideration of the needs of maternity; though, to speak candidly, I desire to make various changes on that point, of which I will speak to you some day. To return to our subject, I ought to tell you that all I have told you up to the present is but feeling the way towards the true nourishment, which is that of the sylphs and the spirits of the air. They drink in the light, which suffices to give strength and wonderful suppleness to their bodies. It is their only potion. One day it will be ours, messieurs. It is a mere question of rendering potable the beams of the sun. I confess to not seeing with sufficient clearness the road to success, and I foresee numerous troubles and great obstacles in the way. If ever some sage attains this goal, mankind will equal the sylphs and salamanders in intelligence and beauty.'

My good master listened to these words sitting bowed in his seat, his head bent in sadness. He seemed to be pondering the changes in his appearance the nutrition imagined by his host would one day bring about.

'Monsieur,' he said at last, 'did you not speak yesterday at the cook-shop of a certain elixir which dispenses with all other nourishment?'

'True,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'but that liquor is only

good for philosophers; by that you will readily conceive that its usage is restricted. It were better not to speak of it.'

However, a doubt troubled me, and I asked permission of my host to put it before him, certain that he would throw light upon it at once. He gave me permission to speak, and I said:

'Monsieur, these salamanders who, you say, are so beautiful, and of whom, by your account, I have formed so charming a notion, have they had the misfortune to spoil their teeth by drinking light as the peasants of Valais have lost theirs by taking nothing but milk food? I allow that I am anxious on the point.'

'My son,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac, 'your curiosity pleases me, and I will satisfy it. Salamanders have no teeth, properly speaking. But their gums are furnished with two rows of very white and shining pearls, which lend an inconceivable grace to their smile. Know, then, that these pearls are but materialized light.'

I told Monsieur d'Astarac that I was very much relieved to hear it. He continued:

'Men's teeth are a sign of their ferocity. When we feed as we ought, these teeth will be replaced by some ornament like the salamander's pearls. Then we shall be unable to imagine how a lover could have looked without horror and disgust on the dog-teeth in his mistress's mouth.'

VII

After dinner our host led us into a large gallery adjoining his study and serving as a library.

There, on oaken shelves, were ranged an innumerable army, or rather a great council, of books, duodecimos, octavos, quartos, folios, bound in calf, sheepskin, morocco, parchment, and pigskin. Six windows threw light on this silent gathering, which stretched from one end of the apartment to the other, the whole length of the high walls. Big tables, al ernating with celestial globes and astronomical instruments, occupied the middle of the gallery.

Monsieur d'Astarac begged us to choose the corner which seemed to us the most convenient for work.

But my good master, his mouth watering, his head thrown back, feasted his eyes and inhaled the very atmosphere of books.

'By Apollo!' he cried, 'a magnificent library indeed! The library of the Bishop of Séez, rich as it is in works on canon law, cannot be compared to this. There is no resort more pleasing to my taste, not even the Elysian Fields described by Virgil. I make out at the first glance so many rare works and so many precious collections that I doubt, monsieur, if any private library can better this, which only yields in France to the Mazarin, and to the Royal. I go so far as to say, at the sight of the Greek and Latin manuscripts which crowd this corner here, that after the Bodleian, the Ambrosian, the Laurentian, and the Vatican, we may name the Astaracian. Without flattering myself, I can scent truffles and books from afar, and I hold you from this moment for the equal of Peiresc,[1] Groslier, and Canevarius, princes among bibliophiles.'

'I top them all,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac calmly, 'and this library is infinitely more precious than all those you have just named. The king's library is but a book-pedlar's lot beside mine, unless you merely reckon by number of volumes and mass of inked paper. Gabriel Naudé,[2] and your Abbé Bignon,[3] renowned as book collectors, in comparison with myself, were but indolent shepherds of a sheepish and ignoble flock of books. As to the Benedictines, I grant you they are industrious, but they have no nicety of discernment, and their libraries reflect the mediocrity of the minds that have formed them. My collection, monsieur, is not on the model of these. The works which I have brought together form a whole which will not fail to procure me the Knowledge. It is gnostic, oecumenical, and spiritual. If all the lines traced on these innumerable leaves of parchment and of paper could enter in due order into your brain, monsieur, you

[1] Savant, b. Provence, 1580–1637.
[2] *Littérateur* and bibliophile, b. Paris, 1600–53.
[3] Scholar and writer, 1589–1656. Life by Perrault.

would know all things, be capable of all things, you would be the master of nature, a worker in plasmic matter; you would hold the world between the two fingers of your hand as I hold these grains of snuff.'

Whereupon he offered his box to my good master.

'You are very good,' said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard.

And, letting his ravished gaze wander once more over his marshalled learning, he cried:

'There, between the third and fourth windows, are shelves bearing an illustrious burden. The Oriental manuscripts are assembled and seem to converse in company. I can see that ten or twelve of them are very venerable under their rags of purple and gold-brocaded silk. There are some who wear clasps of precious stones to their coats, like the Byzantine emperors. Others again are shut in plaques of ivory.'

'Those,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'are the cabbalist Jews, Arabic and Persian. That is *The Hand of Power* you have just opened. Alongside you will find *The Spread Table*, *The Faithful Pastor*, *Fragments of the Temple*, and *The Light in Darkness*. One place is empty: that of *The Still Waters*, a precious treatise which Mosaïde is at the moment studying. Mosaïde, as I have already told you, messieurs, is occupied in my house in discovering the most profound secrets contained in Hebrew writings, and, although more than a hundred years old, this rabbi is unwilling to die until he has penetrated the meaning of every cabbalistic symbol. I am under great obligation to him; therefore I beg of you, messieurs, when you see him, to evince the same feelings towards him that I have myself.

'But enough of that, and now let us turn to what particularly concerns you. I thought, Monsieur l'Abbé, you might transcribe and put into Latin these Greek manuscripts of inestimable value. I have faith in your knowledge and in your zeal, and I do not doubt that your young pupil will soon be of great help to you.' And, addressing himself to me:

'Yes, my son, I have great hopes of you. They are founded in great measure on the education you have

received. For you were, so to speak, nourished in the flames, under a chimney-hood haunted by salamanders. This circumstance has great weight.'

As he spoke, he seized an armful of manuscripts which he placed on the table.

'This,' he said, pointing to a roll of papyrus, 'comes from Egypt. It is a work of Zozimus the Panopolitan,[1] which was thought to be lost, and which I myself found in the coffin of a priest of Serapis. And what you see there,' he added, showing us some shreds of shining and fibrous leaves on which Greek characters traced with a brush were dimly to be discerned, 'are quite unheard-of revelations which we owe, the one to Sophar, the Persian, the other to John, arch-priest of St Evagia.

'I shall be infinitely obliged to you if you will first of all busy yourselves with these works. Afterwards we will study the manuscripts of Synesius, Bishop of Ptolemaïs, of Olympiodorus, and Stephanus, which I found in Ravenna in a vault where they had been shut up since the reign of the ignorant Theodosius, surnamed the Great.

'Messieurs, you will please first get an idea of what this vast work will mean. At the end of the room you will find, to the right of the fire-place, all the lexicons and grammars I have been able to collect, and these will be of some use to you. Permit me to leave you; there are four or five sylphs awaiting me in my study. Crito will see that you want for nothing. Farewell.'

As soon as Monsieur d'Astarac was out of the room my good master sat down before the papyrus of Zozimus and, arming himself with a magnifying glass he had found on the table, began to decipher it. I asked him if he had not been surprised at all he had just heard.

He answered without raising his head:

'My son, I have known too many kinds of people and gone through too many changes of fortune to be astonished

[1] Celebrated hermetic philosopher of the third century. Greatest of the alchemists. According to Photius the historian Zozimus wrote twenty-eight works of alchemy and dedicated them to his sister Theosebia. There are manuscripts of his in the Librairie Nationale at Paris.

at anything. This gentleman appears to be mad, less because he is really so than because his thoughts are so excessively different from those of the vulgar. But if one paid attention to the conversation commonly held in this world one would find less sense than in that of this philosopher. Left to itself, even the loftiest human reason builds its palaces and temples in the clouds, and truly Monsieur d'Astarac gathers a sufficiency of fog. There is no truth but in God; do not forget that, my son. But this verily is the book *Imouth* which Zozimus the Panopolitan wrote for his sister Theosebia. What glory and what joy to read this unique manuscript, found again in such wonderful fashion! I shall consecrate my days and my nights to it. I pity those ignorant men whose idleness throws them into debauchery. It is a miserable life they lead. What is a woman compared with an Alexandrian papyrus? Compare, I ask you, this most notable library with a wine-shop, the 'Petit Bacchus,' and the handling of this precious manuscript with the caresses one bestows on girls in an arbour, and tell me, my son, in which choice does true content abide? I, boon companion of the Muses, and admitted to those wordless revels of meditation that the orator of Madaura celebrated with eloquence, I give thanks to God that He has made me an honest man.'

VIII

For the space of a month or six weeks, Monsieur Coignard applied himself day and night, as he had promised, to reading Zozimus the Panopolitan.

During meals, which we took at Monsieur d'Astarac's table, the conversation ran but on the opinions of the Gnostics and on the knowledge of the ancient Egyptians. Being but a very ignorant scholar, I gave my master little enough help. Still I busied myself in researches under his directions to the best of my ability; I took a certain pleasure in them. And we undoubtedly lived a happy and peaceful life. Towards the seventh week Monsieur d'Astarac gave

me leave to go and see my parents at the cook-shop. The shop seemed to me strangely shrunk. My mother was there, alone and sad. She gave a loud cry when she saw me equipped like a young prince.

'My Jacques,' she said, 'I am happy indeed.'

And she began to cry. We embraced one another. Then, wiping her eyes with a corner of her coarse apron she said:

'Your father is at the 'Petit Bacchus.' He goes there a great deal since you left, for he takes less pleasure in his home now that you are away. He will be pleased to see you again. But tell me, my Jacquot, are you pleased with your new life? I have had my regrets that I let you go away with this nobleman. I even accused myself in confession, to the third curate, of having preferred the good of your body to that of your soul, and of not having given enough thought to God in placing you out. The third curate rebuked me kindly and exhorted me to follow the example of the virtuous women of Holy Scripture, of whom he named several to me, but those are names that I see plainly enough I shall never remember. He did not explain himself very fully, as it was Saturday night and the church was full of penitents.'

I comforted my good mother as well as I could, and told her how Monsieur d'Astarac made me work at Greek, which is the language of the Gospel. This thought was pleasing to her. Nevertheless, she was still troubled.

'You will never guess, my Jacques,' she said to me, 'who has been speaking to me of Monsieur d'Astarac. Why, Cadette Saint-Avit, the servant of the priest of Saint-Benoît. She comes from Gascony, from a place called Laroque-Timbaut, quite near Sainte-Eulalie, where Monsieur d'Astarac is lord of the manor. Cadette Saint-Avit is old, you know, as a priest's servant should be. When she was young and lived in the neighbourhood, she knew the three Messieurs d'Astarac, one of whom, captain of a ship, was drowned at sea. He was the youngest. The second, colonel of a regiment, wnet to the wars and was killed there. The eldest, Hercule d'Astarac, is the only survivor. It is this one, then, whom you are with, and for your good, my

Jacques, at least I hope so. When young he was magnificent in his attire, liberal in his ways, but of a gloomy disposition. He held aloof from public office, and did not seem eager to enter the king's service as his brothers did, and there meet an honourable end. He was in the habit of saying that there was nothing glorious in bearing a sword at one's side, that he knew no trade more ignoble than the noble career of arms, and that a village bone-setter was, in his opinion, much above a brigadier or marshal of France. Such was his talk. I must own that it does not seem either bad or mischievous to me, but rather bold and odd. Still, it must in some measure be condemned, since Cadette Saint-Avit said that the priest took exception to it, as contrary to the ordering of things established by God in the world, and as opposed to passages in the Bible, where God is called a name which means field-marshal. That would be a great sin. Monsieur Hercule held himself so aloof from the court that he refused to make the journey from Versailles to be presented to His Majesty, as his birth warranted. He said: "The king does not visit me. I shall not visit him." And it stands to reason, my Jacquot, that this is a most unnatural speech.'

My good mother looked at me with troubled interrogation, and then went on in the same way:

'What I have still to tell you, my Jacquot, is even less credible. Yet Cadette Saint-Avit spoke of it as sure and certain. I will tell you then, that Monsieur Hercule d'Astarac, not leaving his domain, cared for nothing but the putting of sunlight into glass bottles. Cadette Saint-Avit did not know how he set about it, but of this much she is certain, that in the course of time, in these glass bottles, well corked and heated in a *bain-marie*, women were formed, very tiny and beautifully made, and dressed like princesses in a play. You laugh, my Jacquot, yet one cannot joke at these things when one sees the consequences. It is a great sin to make creatures in this way who cannot be baptized and can never participate in bliss eternal. For you can scarcely imagine that Monsieur d'Astarac took these little dolls to the priest, in their bottles, to hold over

the baptismal font? They could never have found a godmother.'

'But, dear mother,' I said, 'Monsieur d'Astarac's dolls have no need of baptism, for they had no share in original sin.'

'I never thought of that,' said my mother, 'and Cadette Saint-Avit herself said nothing about it, although she is servant to a priest. Unfortunately, she left Gascony very young to come to France, and she heard no more of Monsieur d'Astarac, his bottles, and his puppets. I hope, indeed, my dear Jacquot, that he has renounced these evil works, which could not be accomplished without the help of the Evil One.'

But I asked:

'Tell me, my good mother, Cadette Saint-Avit, the priest's servant, did she see with her own eyes these ladies in the bottles?'

'Not so, my child; Monsieur d'Astarac was far too secretive to show these dolls. But she heard them spoken of by an ecclesiastic of the name of Fulgence, who was always about the château and swore he had seen these little people come out of their glass prison and dance a minuet. And, therefore, she had all the more reason for believing it. For one may doubt what one sees but not the word of an honest man, particularly when he is an ecclesiastic. There is another drawback to these practices, that is, that they are extremely costly, and one cannot imagine, Cadette Saint-Avit said, the expense Monsieur Hercule went to, to procure the bottles of various shapes, the furnaces, and the books of magic with which he had filled his château. But by the death of his brothers he became the richest gentleman in the province, and while he wasted his substance in folly his fat land worked for him. Cadette Saint-Avit judges that notwithstanding his outlay he must still be very rich, even now.'

As she spoke my father entered the shop. He embraced me fondly and confided to me that the house had lost half its attraction in consequence of my departure and that of Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, who was a good fellow and a jovial. He complimented me on my clothes and gave

me some hints on deportment, declaring that business had bred an affable manner in him from the continual obligation he was under to greet customers as if they were gentlemen, even when they were of the vulgarest sort. He gave me the advice to round my elbow and turn out my toes, and counselled me over and above to go and see Léandre, at the fair of Saint-Germain, so as to model myself on him.

We dined together with good appetite, and parted in floods of tears. I loved them both very much, and what made me cry most was that I felt that, in six weeks of absence, they had become nearly strangers to me. And I think that their grief came from the same feeling.

IX

It was pitch dark when I left the cook-shop. At the corner of the rue des Écrivains I heard a rich deep voice singing:

'If it be thine honour 's lost,
Frail and fair, 'twas thy desire.'

And soon, on the side whence came this voice, I saw Brother Ange, who, his wallet swinging on his shoulder and holding Catherine, the lace-maker, round the waist, was walking in the shadow with staggering and triumphal gait, throwing up the water of the gutter under his sandals in magnificent great splashes of mud which seemed to celebrate his sottish gloriousness, as the fountains at Versailles play in honour of kings. I stood against a stone doorpost that they might not see me. But it was an unnecessary precaution, for they were too occupied with one another. Catherine laughed, with head thrown back on the monk's shoulder. A ray of moonlight played on her fresh lips, and in her eyes, as in spring waters. And I went on my way, vexed to the soul, with a weight on my heart, thinking on the rounded shape of this beautiful girl pressed in the arms of a dirty Capuchin.

'How should it be,' I asked myself, 'that so sweet a

thing should come into such foul hands? And if Catherine disdains me, need she yet make her scorn the more cruel by the liking she shows for this filthy Brother Ange?'

The preference seemed to me astonishing, and surprised as much as it disgusted me. But it was not in vain that I was the pupil of Monsieur Jérôme Coignard. The incomparable master had formed my mind to meditation. I pictured to myself the satyrs one sees in gardens ravishing the nymphs, and I reflected that, if Catherine was made like a nymph, the satyrs, such as they are exhibited to us, were as frightful as the monk. I came to the conclusion that I should not be too much astonished at what I had just seen. Still my reason did not dissipate my grief; no doubt because it did not come from that source. These meditations led me, through the shades of night and the puddles melted by the thaw, to the Saint-Germain road, where I met Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard, who had been supping in the town and was returning late to the Cross of Les Sablons.

'My son,' he said, 'I have just been discussing Zozimus and the Gnostics at the table of a very learned ecclesiastic, a second Peiresc. The wine was poor and the cheer but middling. But nectar and ambrosia flowed in our speech.'

My good master then spoke of the Panopolitan with unimaginable eloquence. Alas, I was a bad listener, thinking of that bead of moonlight that fell through the dark on Catherine's lips.

At last he paused, and I asked him on what ground the Greeks had founded the nymphs' taste for satyrs. My good master was ready with an answer to any questions, so extensive was his knowledge. He said:

'My son, it is a taste founded on natural sympathy. Although less ardent, it is as pronounced as that of the satyrs for the nymphs to which it corresponds. Poets have well observed the distinction. In this connection I will tell you a singular adventure I read of in a manuscript which belonged to the Bishop of Séez's library. It was (I see it still) a compilation in folio written in a fair hand of the last century. The singular story it told was this. A Norman gentleman and his wife took part in a public

merry-making, the one disguised as a satyr, the other as a nymph. One knows from Ovid with what ardour the satyrs pursued the nymphs. This gentleman had read the *Metamorphoses*. He entered so well into the spirit of his disguise that nine months afterwards his wife presented him with a child that had goat's feet and the horned brow. What became of the father we do not know, except that he died — a lot common to all — leaving, along with his little goat-foot, another and a younger child, a Christian this one, and of human form. This younger son appealed to the law that his brother should be deprived of the paternal inheritance by reason that he did not belong to the race redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. The Parliament of Normandy, sitting in Rouen, gave judgment in his favour and the decree was registered.'

I asked my good master if it were possible that such a travesty could have its effect on nature, and if the shape of the child could result from the cut of a coat. Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard advised me not to believe a word of it.

'Jacques Tournebroche, my son,' said he, 'always bear in mind that a sound intelligence rejects everything that is contrary to reason, except in matters of faith, where it is necessary to believe blindly. God be thanked, I have never erred in the matter of the dogmas of our holy religion, and I trust that I shall be found in this disposition when on the point of death.'

While talking thus we arrived at the château. In the midst of the darkness the roof showed up with a red illumination. From one of the chimneys sparks poured out which mounted in volumes to fall again in golden rain under the thick smoke which hid the sky. We both thought that flames were devouring the building. My good master tore his hair and groaned.

'My Zozimus! my papyri! my Greek manuscripts! Help! help! my Zozimus!'

Running up the avenue through pools of water which reflected the glow of the fire, we crossed the park, which was buried in deep shadow, still and deserted. In the château all seemed asleep. We heard the roar of the fire, which filled the dark staircase. We went up two steps

at a time, stopping at moments to hear whence came this awful noise.

It seemed to come from a corridor on the first floor where we had never yet set foot. We felt our way along in this direction, and seeing a red light through the cracks of a closed door we flung ourselves upon it. It yielded suddenly.

Monsieur d'Astarac, who had opened it, stood tranquilly before us. His long, black-clad figure stood erect in a very atmosphere of flame. He asked us quietly what urgent matter made us seek him at this hour.

There was no conflagration, but an enormous fire issuing from a reverberatory furnace, known to me since as an athanor. The whole of this room, and it was big enough, was full of long-necked glass bottles surmounted by winding, duck-billed glass tubes; retorts, like faces with inflated cheeks, whence sprang a spout like an elephant's trunk; crucibles, matrasses, cupels, cucurbits, and vessels of unknown shapes.

My good master, wiping his face, which shone like fire, said:

'Ah, monsieur! we thought the château was blazing like a handful of straw. Thank God, the library is not burnt. But I see, monsieur, that you practise the spagyric art.'

'I will not conceal from you,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac, 'that I have made considerable progress in it, without, however, having altogether found the Theleme, which would complete my work. At the very moment you burst in I was in the act of distilling the Spirit of the World and the Flower of Heaven, which is the true Fountain of Youth. Do you understand alchemy at all, Monsieur Coignard?'

The Abbé replied that he had acquired a certain smattering from books, but he held the practice pernicious, and contrary to religion.

Monsieur d'Astarac smiled and said:

'You are too able a man, Monsieur Coignard, not to know the Flying Eagle, the Bird of Hermes, the Fowl of Hermogenes, the Raven's Head, the Green Lion, and the Phoenix.'

'I have heard it said,' replied my good master, 'that those are the names of the philosopher's stone in its different states. But I doubt the possibility of transmuting metals.'

Monsieur d'Astarac answered very confidently:

'Nothing is easier for me, monsieur, than to put an end to your uncertainty.'

He went and opened an old rickety cupboard propped against the wall, took out a copper coin bearing the effigy of the late king, and drew our attention to a round spot which ran through it.

'That,' he said, 'is the effect of the stone which has transmuted the copper into silver. But that is but a trifle.'

He returned to the cupboard and took out a sapphire as large as an egg, an opal of marvellous size, and a handful of perfectly beautiful emeralds.

'Here,' he said, 'is some of my work, which will sufficiently prove to you that the spagyric art is not the dream of an empty brain.'

At the bottom of the bowl where the stones lay were five or six small diamonds which Monsieur d'Astarac did not even mention. My good master asked if they were also of his making. And the alchemist having replied that they were, the Abbé said:

'Monsieur, I advise you first to show these latter to the curious, for prudence' sake. If you first show the sapphire, opal, and the ruby, they will say that only the devil could produce such stones, and they will proceed against you for sorcery. Moreover, only the devil could live comfortably with these furnaces, where one inhales the very flames. As for me, who have been here but a quarter of an hour, I am already nearly cooked.'

Monsieur d'Astarac smiled benevolently, and showing us out explained himself as follows:

'Although knowing well what to think as regards the reality of the devil and of that Other, I am always willing to speak of them with those who believe in them. The devil and that Other are, as we may say, characters; and we may talk of them as of Achilles and Thersites. Rest

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assured, messieurs, that, if the devil be what they say, he does not dwell in so subtle an element as fire. It is contradiction of the worst kind to put so evil a beast in the substance of the sun. But as I had the honour to explain, Monsieur Tournebroche, to your mother's friend, the Capuchin, I consider that Christians calumniate Satan and his demons. That there may be, in some unknown land, beings yet more wicked than men is possible, though barely conceivable. Assuredly, if they do exist, they inhabit regions deprived of light, and if they burn it is in ice, which truthfully enough causes acute pain, and not in illustrious flames amidst the ardent daughters of the stars. They suffer, because they are wicked and wickedness is an ill, but it can be but from frost-bite. As to your Satan, messieurs, who is held in such horror by our theologians, I do not think him so contemptible, to judge by all you say of him, and if, peradventure, he exists, I should take him for no evil beast, but rather for some slight sylph, or, to put him at the lowest, for a metal-working gnome, very intelligent and slightly ironical.'

My good master stopped his ears and fled that he might not hear any more.

'What impiety, Tournebroche, my son,' he cried on the stairs, 'what blasphemy! Did you fully understand the detestableness of this philosopher's principles? He pushes his atheism to the point of a frenzied rejoicing which confounds me. But that of itself renders him nearly innocent in the matter, for, being separate from all belief, he cannot lacerate Holy Church as do those who are still partially attached to her by some half-severed and still bleeding member. Such, my son, are the Lutherans and the Calvinists, whose secession is the gangrene of the Church. Atheists, on the contrary, are their own damnation, and one may dine with them without sin. So we need have no scruples in living with this Monsieur d'Astarac, who believes in neither God nor devil. But did you notice, Tournebroche, my son, that at the bottom of the bowl lay a handful of small diamonds he himself scarcely troubled to take count of, and which seemed to me of very good water? I have my doubts about the

opal and the sapphire. As to those small diamonds, they seemed to me to be the real thing.'

Having reached our rooms upstairs, we bade each other good night.

X

We led, my good master and I, a secluded and regular life until the spring came. We worked all the morning, shut up in the library, and we returned there after dinner as to the play, according to Monsieur Jérôme Coignard's expression; not indeed, as this excellent man said, to witness a scurrilous show, after the manner of men of fashion and lackeys, but to hear the sublime if contradictory dialogues of ancient writers.

In this way the reading and translation of the Panopolitan advanced wonderfully. To this I scarcely contributed. Such work was beyond my knowledge, and it was as much as I could do to learn the shape the Greek characters took on papyrus. At the same time I helped my master to consult the authors who could throw light on his researches, particularly Olympiodorus and Photius,[1] who since then have ever remained familiar to me. The little help I gave him raised me much in my own estimation.

After a long and bitter winter I was in a fair way to become a savant, when the spring came all at once with her gay train of sunshine, of tender green, and the song of birds. The scent of the lilac which mounted into the library made me fall to vague dreamings, from which my good master brusquely dragged me, saying:

'Jacquot Tournebroche, climb up the steps if you please, and tell me if that rogue of a Manetho [2] does not speak of a god Imhotep, who with his contradictions torments me like a fiend?'

[1] His elevation to the Patriarchate of Constantinople caused a great schism. He was deposed by Basilius, recalled, and a second time deposed by Leo in 886. He wrote *Myriobiblon*, a work containing a summary of 280 different authors, and his collection of the Canons of the Church, his Letters, and his Lexicon are also famous.

[2] Egyptian historian, third century B.C.

And my good master charged his nose with snuff with an air of much content.

'My son,' he said further, 'it is to be remarked that our clothes have great influence on our moral being. Since my clerical collar is all spotted with different sauces that I have let drop on it I do not feel so worthy a man. Tournebroche, now you are clad like a marquis, are you not tickled with the desire to assist at an opera-dancer's toilet, and to push a rouleau of false louis on to a faro-table? In a word, don't you feel yourself a man of quality? Do not take what I say in bad part, and remember that it is sufficient to give a coward a bearskin cap to make him go and get his head broken in the king's service. Tournebroche, our feelings are made up of a thousand things which escape us by their very minuteness, and the destiny of our immortal soul depends sometimes on a breath too light to bend a blade of grass. We are the plaything of the winds. But hand me, I beg you, the *Rudiments* of Vossius [1] whose red edges I see gaping open under your left arm.'

That day, after the three o'clock dinner, Monsieur d'Astarac took my good master and myself for a walk in the park. He led us to the west side, which looked out on Rueil and Mont Valérien. It was the most withdrawn and the loneliest. Ivy, and grass, close-cropped by the rabbits, covered the walks, which were blocked here and there by huge trunks of dead trees. The marble statues on either side smiled, knowing nothing of their ruin. A nymph with her broken hand to her lips signed to a shepherd to be discreet. A young faun, whose head lay on the ground, still sought his lips with his flute. And all these divine beings seemed to teach us to despise the hurts of time and fortune. We followed the banks of a canal where the rain-water refreshed the small green frogs. At one point, at the juncture of several walks, were tilted vases shere the wood pigeons drank. Having come to this spot, we took a narrow path cut in the underwood.

'Walk carefully,' said Monsieur d'Astarac. 'This path is dangerous, for it is bordered with mandragoras who

[1] German savant, b. Heidelberg, 1577–1649.

sing at nightfull at the foot of the trees. They are hidden in the ground. Take care not to step on them; you would either catch love-sickness or a thirst for riches, and you would be lost, for the passions inspired by the mandragora are melancholy.'

I asked him how we could possibly avoid this unseen danger. Monsieur d'Astarac replied that one could escape it by divining it intuitively and not otherwise.

'Anyway,' he added, 'this path is perilous.'

It led straight to a brick cottage hidden in ivy, which had doubtless once served as a keeper's lodge. Here the park terminated on the monotonous marshes of the Seine.

'You see this cottage,' said Monsieur d'Astarac. 'It has in its keeping the wisest of men. There it is that Mosaïde, now aged one hundred and twelve years, penetrates with a persistency that has a majesty of its own to the arcana of nature. He has left Imbonatus [1] and Bartolini [2] far behind him. I desired to honour myself by entertaining under my roof the greatest of cabbalists since Enoch, the son of Cain. But religious scruples prevent Mosaïde from sitting at my table, which he holds for Christian—in which he does it too much honour. You cannot conceive to what extremity of violence this sage carries his hatred of Christians. It is under great persuasion only that he consents to inhabit this cottage, where he lives alone with his niece Jael. Messieurs, you must no longer delay in making his acquaintance, and I will present you both immediately to this inspired being.'

Having spoken thus, Monsieur d'Astarac pushed us into the cottage and made us climb up by a spiral staircase to a room where, in the midst of scattered manuscripts, in a great winged chair, sat an aged man, bright-eyed, hook-nosed, whose sloping chin let fall two thin streamers of white beard. A velvet cap, shaped like an imperial crown, covered his bald head, and his body, so thin as to be scarcely human, was wrapped in an old yellow silk gown, splendid but soiled.

[1] His *Bibliotheca Latina-Hebraica* was published at Rome, 1694.

[2] B. Perugia, fifteenth century. Controversy with Pico della Mirandola.

Although his piercing gaze was turned towards us, he showed no sign of being aware of our approach. His face showed a painful stubbornness and he twisted slowly, between his wrinkled fingers, the reed which served him as a pen.

'Do not expect empty words from Mosaïde,' said Monsieur d'Astarac. 'For many a long day this sage has discoursed with no one save the genii and myself. His discourse is sublime. As he will doubtless not consent to converse with you, messieurs, I will give you in a few words an idea of his worth. The first, he has penetrated to the spiritual meaning of the books of Moses in accordance with the value of the Hebrew characters, which depend on the order of the letters in the alphabet. This order had been upset after the eleventh letter. Mosaïde has re-established it, which Atrabis, Philo,[1] Avicenna,[2] Raymond Lully,[3] Pico della Mirandola,[4] Reuchlin,[5] Henry More, and Robert Fludd were unable to do. Mosaïde knows the golden number which corresponds to Jehovah in the world of spirits. And you will understand, messieurs, that that is of infinite importance.'

My good master drew his box from his pocket and after offering it civilly to us inhaled a pinch of snuff, and said:

'Do you not think, Monsieur d'Astarac, that these attainments are extremely likely to guide you to the devil at the end of this transitory life? For this Seigneur Mosaïde errs palpably in his interpretation of Holy Writ. When our Saviour died on the cross for the redemption of mankind, the synagogue felt a bandage tighten over her eyes, she tottered like a drunken woman, and her crown fell from her head. Since then, the interpretation of the Old Testament has been confined to the Catholic Church, to which I belong notwithstanding my multiple sins.'

At these words, Mosaïde, looking like a satyr, smiled in

[1] Surnamed the Jew. Philosopher, b. Alexandria, 20 B.C.

[2] Arab physician, 980–1037.

[3] Spanish writer, alchemist, known as 'Doctor illuminatus,' b. Palma, 1235–1315.

[4] Italian scholar, wrote *De omni re scibili*, 1463–94.

[5] Savant, humanist, b. Pforzheim, 1455–1522.

a manner truly terrifying, and addressed my good master in a slow, grating, far-away voice:

'The Masorah [1] has not confided its secrets to you, nor the Mishnah [2] its mysteries.'

'Mosaïde,' continued Monsieur d'Astarac, 'interprets clearly not only the books of Moses but that of Enoch, which is much more important, and which for lack of understanding the Christians have rejected, as the cock in the Arabian fable disdained the pearl fallen in his food. This book of Enoch, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, is the more precious as one finds therein the first dealings of the daughters of men with the sylphs. For you well understand that these angels whom Enoch shows us as allying themselves with women in amorous intercourse are sylphs and salamanders.'

'I am ready to understand it that way,' replied my good master, 'so as not to annoy you. But by what has been left to us of the book of Enoch, which is obviously apocryphal, I suspect that those angels were not sylphs, but Phoenician merchants.'

'And on what, may I ask, do you found such a strange opinion?' said Monsieur d'Astarac.

'I found it, monsieur, on this, that it says in this book that it was the angels who taught to women the usage of bracelets and necklaces, the art of painting their eyebrows, and of using all kinds of dyes. It is also recounted in this book that the angels taught to the daughters of men the properties of roots and trees, charms, and the art of star-gazing. In all good faith, monsieur, have not these angels rather the look of Tyrians or Sidonians disembarking on some half-wild coast, and undoing at the foot of the rocks their corded bales to tempt the daughters of the savage tribes? These traffickers gave them necklaces of copper, amulets, and medicaments, in exchange for amber, incense, and furs, and they amazed these handsome ignorant creatures by their talk of the stars from a knowledge gained in navigation. That is all straightforward, and I should like to know on what point Monsieur Mosaïde can gainsay it.'

[1] A body of critical information on the Hebrew Old Testament.
[2] A collection of precepts forming the basis of the *Talmud*.

Mosaïde kept silence, and Monsieur d'Astarac smiled once more.

'Monsieur Coignard,' he said, 'you do not argue badly, ignorant as you are still of gnosticism and cabbalism. What you say makes me think that there may have been some gnomes who were metal workers and goldsmiths among the sylphs who united themselves in love with the daughters of men. Gnomes, in fact, readily busy themselves with goldsmiths' work, and probably ingenious demons wrought those bracelets you think were of Phoenician manufacture. But you will suffer some disadvantages, I warn you, monsieur, in measuring yourself with Mosaïde in the knowledge of human antiquities. He has found remains thought to be lost, among others the column of Seth and the oracles of Sambethe, daughter of Noah, and the most ancient of the sibyls.'

'Oh!' exclaimed my good master, bounding on the dusty floor, whence arose a cloud of dust, 'oh! what moonshine! It is too much of a good thing! You are laughing at me. And Monsieur Mosaïde cannot house so many follies in his head under his big cap, which looks like Charlemagne's crown. This column of Seth is a ridiculous invention of that thickhead Flavius Josephus, an absurd tale which has never yet deceived any one but you. As to the predictions of Sambethe, the daughter of Noah, I should be very curious to know them, and Monsieur Mosaïde, who seems sparing enough of his words, would oblige me greatly by giving us a few by word of mouth, for it is not possible for him, I am glad to see, to utter them by the more hidden way through which the ancient sibyls were accustomed to give utterance to their mysterious replies.'

Mosaïde, who appeared not to have heard anything, suddenly said:

'The daughter of Noah has spoken; Sambethe has said: "The foolish man who laughs and mocks shall not hear the voice coming from the seventh tabernacle; and the impious shall go wretchedly to his ruin."'

On this utterance all three of us took leave of Mosaïde.

XI

THAT year the summer was glorious, whence came a wish to wander afield. One day, as I strolled under the trees of the Cours-la-Reine, with two poor crowns that I had found that morning in my breeches pocket, and which were the first visible sign so far of my alchemist's munificence, I took a seat at the door of a coffee-house at a table whose small size befitted my solitude and my modesty, and there I fell a-thinking of the oddness of my fate, while on either side of me musketeers and gay ladies drank the wine of Spain. I wondered whether the Cross of Les Sablons, Monsieur d'Astarac, Mosaïde, the papyrus of Zozimus, and my fine coat were not all dreams from which I should awake to find myself in dimity before the spit at the 'Reine Pédauque.' I came out of my dream on feeling myself pulled by the sleeve. And I saw before me Brother Ange, whose face was lost between his cowl and his beard.

'Monsieur Jacques Ménétrier,' he said, in a low voice, 'a young lady who wishes you well awaits you in her carriage on the road between the river and the Porte de la Conférence.'

My heart beat loudly. Startled and charmed with the adventure, I went immediately to the spot indicated by the Capuchin, walking, nevertheless, with the measured step which seemed best to become me. Arrived on the quay I saw a coach, and a little white hand on the edge of the door.

The door opened on my approach, and I was extremely surprised to find Mam'selle Catherine in the coach, in a rose-coloured satin dress, her head covered with a hood, her blond hair intermingled with the black lace.

Dumbfounded I hesitated at the step.

'Come in,' she said, 'and sit by me. Close the door, I pray you. You must not be seen. A moment ago, in passing along the Cours, I saw you at the coffee-house. I immediately sent the good brother to fetch you. I engaged him for my Lenten practices, and I have kept him with me since, for, in whatever condition one may be

placed, one must cling to religion. You look very well, Monsieur Jacques, seated before your little table, your sword across your knees, wearing the melancholy air of a man of quality. I have always had a friendly feeling for you, and I am not one of those women who, in prosperity, despise their former friends.'

'Eh, what, Mam'selle Catherine?' I exclaimed, 'this coach, these lackeys, this satin dress——'

'All due,' she said, 'to the kindness of Monsieur de la Guéritaude, who is in the revenue department, and is one of our richest financiers. He has advanced money to the king. He is a good friend, whom I would not vex for anything in the world. But he is not as agreeable as you, Monsieur Jacques. He has also given me a small house at Grenelle, which I will show you one day from attic to cellar. Monsieur Jacques, I am very pleased to see you on the way to making your fortune. Merit always makes its way. You shall see my bedroom, which is a copy of that of Mademoiselle Davilliers. It is all mirrors and *magots*. How is your good father? Between ourselves, he neglected his wife and his cook-shop a little. It is exceedingly wrong of a man in his position. But let us talk of you.'

'Let us talk of you, Mam'selle Catherine,' I said at last. 'You are very pretty, and it is a great pity that you are so fond of Capuchins. For one must forgive you your farmers-general.'

'Oh,' she said, 'do not reproach me with Brother Ange. I only keep him for my soul's good, and if I gave Monsieur de la Guéritaude a rival it would be——'

'It would be?'

'Do not ask me, Monsieur Jacques. You are ungrateful. For you know I always singled you out. But you took no notice of it.'

'On the contrary, I was alive to your mockery, Mam'selle Catherine. You made me ashamed of my beardless chin. You told me many a time that I was a little stupid.'

''Twas true, Monsieur Jacques, truer than you thought. Why did you not guess that I meant you well?'

'And you, Catherine, why were you so intimidatingly

pretty? I dared not look at you. And then I saw one day that you were downright vexed with me.'

'I had reason to be so, Monsieur Jacques. You preferred that Savoyard with her kerchief round her head, the very dregs of the Port Saint-Nicholas.'

'Oh, do believe, Catherine, that it was neither taste nor inclination, but merely because she took strong means to conquer my bashfulness.'

'Ah, my friend, believe me who am your senior, bashfulness is a great sin against love. But could you not see that beggar had holes in her stockings and a flounce of mud and dirt half an ell wide at the hem of her skirt?'

'I saw it, Catherine.'

'Did you not see, Jacques, that she was badly made and, what's worse, positively skinny?'

'I saw it, Catherine.'

'You could actually love that beggar of a Savoyard, you with your fair skin and distinguished manners?'

'I cannot understand it myself, Catherine. It must have been that at the time my fancy was full of you. And, if the mere thought of you gave me the hardihood and courage with which you reproach me to-day, judge of my transports, Catherine, if I had held you in my arms, or even a girl a little like you. For I loved you dearly.'

She took my hand and sighed. I continued in a melancholy tone:

'Yes, I loved you, Catherine, and I should love you still were it not for that disgusting monk.'

She defended herself:

'What a suspicion! You make me cross. It is absurd.'

'You do not love Capuchins?'

'Fie!'

Not considering it opportune to press her too closely on the subject, I took her by the waist; we embraced one another, our lips met, and I felt my whole being dissolve in delight.

After a moment of delicious abandon, she disengaged herself, her cheeks pink, eyes dewy, and lips half open. From that day I have known how much a woman is beautified and adorned by the kisses one puts on her lips. Mine

had made roses of the most delicate tint bloom on Catherine's cheeks, and drowned the blue flower of her eyes in sparkling dew.

'You are a child,' she said, replacing her hood. 'Go along with you. You must not stay a moment longer. Monsieur de la Guéritaude will be here directly. He loves me with an impatience that is apt to forestall the hour of the appointment.'

Then, reading on my face the disappointment I felt, she pursued with tender vivacity:

'But listen, Jacques: he goes home every evening at nine o'clock to his old wife, who has become peevish with years, and no longer permits his infidelities now that she is beyond the possibility of paying them back. Her jealousy has become something terrible. Come at half-past nine to-night. I will receive you. My house is at the corner of the rue du Bac. You will know it by its three windows on every floor, and its rose-covered balcony. You know I have always loved flowers. Till to-night.'

She put me from her with a caressing gesture wherein she seemed to show her sorrow that I might not stay; then, finger on lips, she whispered once more:

'Till to-night.'

XII

I DO not know how I managed to tear myself away from Catherine's arms. But it is certain that, in jumping out of the coach, I nearly fell over Monsieur d'Astarac, whose tall figure was planted like a tree on the edge of the road. I saluted him politely and evinced my surprise at so happy a chance.

'Chance,' he said, 'diminishes in proportion as knowledge is augmented: for me it does not exist. I knew, my son, that I was to meet you here. I must have an interview with you which has been too long deferred. Let us, if you please, go in search of that solitude and silence necessary to the speech I wish to have with you. Do not

look anxious. The mysteries that I shall unveil to you are sublime, it is true, but of a pleasing nature.'

Having thus spoken, he led me to the banks of the Seine, hard by the Isle of Swans, which lifted itself in midstream like a leafy barque. There he signalled the ferry-man, whose boat bore us to the verdant isle, frequented only by a few pensioners who on fine days played at bowls and drank their glass of beer. Night lit her first stars in the sky and gave voice to the insects in the grass. The isle was deserted. Monsieur d'Astarac sat down on a wooden bench, at the light end of an avenue of walnut-trees, invited me to sit down by him, and spoke in these words:

'There are three kinds of people, my son, from whom the philosopher must hide his secrets. They are princes, because it would not be prudent to add to their might; the ambitious, whose pitiless driving-power wants no reinforcement; and the debauched, who would find in the hidden knowledge the means of glutting their worst passions. But I may bare my mind to you who are neither debauched, for I think nothing of the slip whereby a moment ago you nearly fell into the arms of that young woman, nor ambitious, having lived till now content to turn the paternal spit. I may then without fear unfold to you the hidden laws of the universe. You must not suppose that life is confined within the narrow condition in which it manifests itself to vulgar eyes. When they teach that creation had man for end and object, your theologians and philosophers reason like the wood-lice in Versailles or the Tuileries, who believe that the damp cellars are made for them, and that the rest of the château is quite uninhabitable. The solar system, taught by the canon Copernicus in the last century, following Aristarchus of Samos and the Pythagorean philosophers, is, no doubt, known to you, for they have even made abridgements of it for the use of urchins at schools and dialogues for the chatterboxes in town. You have seen an instrument at my house which demonstrates it perfectly by means of a clockwork movement.

'Look up, my son, and see above your head the Chariot

of David, drawn by Mizar and his two illustrious companions, turning round the Pole; Arcturus, Vega in Lyra, Spica in Virgo, Ariadne's Crown and its lovely pearl. These are suns. One glance at the world will show you that all creation is a work of fire and that life, under its highest forms, must be nourished by flame!

'And what are the planets? Specks of mud, a little scum and ferment. Contemplate the stately choir of the stars, this gathering of suns. They equal or surpass our own in grandeur and in might, and when, some clear winter night, I show you Sirius through my glass, your eyes and your soul will be dazzled.

'Can you really believe that Sirius, Altair, Regulus, Aldebaran, all these suns indeed, are merely luminaries? Can you believe that old Phoebus, who pours incessantly through the space wherein we float his immeasurable floods of heat and light, has no other function than to illuminate the earth and a few other imperceptible and contemptible planets? What a candle! A million times bigger than the house!

'I have been obliged to give you the idea to start with that the universe is composed of suns, and that the planets that may be found there are less than nothing. But I foresee that you would raise an objection, and I will reply to it. These suns, you were going to say, burn out in the course of ages and become as dirt in their turn. "Not so!" I reply, for they are sustained by the comets that they draw to them and which fall into them. They are the habitation of the real life. The planets and this earth in which we live are but the dwelling-places of spectres. Such are the truths which you must first absorb.

'Now that you understand, my son, that fire excels every other element, you will better grasp what I am about to explain to you, which is of more importance than anything you have learnt up to now and even more than was ever known to Erasmus, Turnebus, and Scaliger. I will not refer to theologians like Quesnel [1] or Bossuet, who, between ourselves, are but the dregs of humanity's

[1] Jansenist theologian, b. Paris. His writings provoked the Bull 'Unigenitus,' 1634–1719.

intelligence, and have scarcely more understanding than a captain in the Guards. We will not lose time in despising these brains comparable in size and contents to wrens' eggs, and we will come at once to the subject of my talk. Whereas creatures formed of clay do not surpass in beauty of form the degree of perfection attained by Antinous and Madame de Parabère, and the faculty of knowledge attained only by Democritus and myself, beings formed of fire enjoy a wisdom and an understanding whose range it is impossible for us to imagine.

'Such, my son, is the nature of the glorious children of the suns; they are masters of the laws of the universe as we are of the rules of chess, and the course of the stars in heaven puzzles them no more than the movement on the chess-board of king, rook, and bishop troubles us. These genii create worlds in corners of space where they were not to be found before, and organize them to their liking. It affords them a momentary distraction from their chief business, which is to mate, one with another, in ineffable love. Yesterday I turned my glass on the sign of Virgo and there I observed a distant vortex of light. No doubt, my son, but that it was the still unformed work of one of these beings of fire.

'Truth to tell, the universe has no other origin. Far from being the result of a single will, it is the result of the sublime caprices of a great number of genii who have found recreation by working at it each in his good time and in his own way. So may we explain its diversity, its magnificence, and its imperfection. For the powers and the clairvoyance of these genii, though immense, have limits. I should deceive you did I say that a man, were he philosopher and magian, could enter into familiar intercourse with them. No one of them has ever manifested himself to me, and all that I tell you of them is known to me but by induction and hearsay. Therefore, although their existence is certain, I should go too far were I to describe to you their ways and their character. We must know our own ignorance, my son, and I pride myself on advancing but fully observed facts. We will then leave these genii or rather these demiurges to their distant

glories and come to the illustrious beings who concern us more nearly. And it is at this point, my son, that you must lend your ear.

'Speaking to you a moment ago of the planets, if I gave way to a sentiment of disdain it was because I was merely considering the skin and surface of these little balls or tops, and the animals which crawl dismally thereon. I should have used another tone if my mind had contemplated, along with the planets, the air and vapour which envelop them. For air is an element which cedes to fire only in nobility, whence it follows that the dignity and illustriousness of planets are in the air which bathes them. These mists, these soft vapours, these zephyrs, these waves of blue, these moving isles of purple and gold which pass above our heads, are the home of a worshipful race. We call them sylphs and salamanders. They are creatures of infinite sweetness and beauty. It is possible and fitting for us to form with them unions, whose delights cannot be dreamt of. Salamanders are of such a kind that beside them the prettiest person in town or at court is but a repulsive monkey. They yield themselves willingly to philosophers. You have no doubt heard tell of the wondrous being by whom Monsieur Descartes was accompanied on his travels. Some said it was a natural daughter he took everywhere with him, others thought it was an automaton that he had made with inimitable art. In reality it was a salamander that this able man had taken for his lady love. He never left her. On one of his passages in the Dutch seas he took her on board, shut up in a box of precious wood lined with satin. The shape of this box and the precautions with which Monsieur Descartes handled it drew the attention of the captain, who, when Monsieur Descartes was asleep, lifted the lid and discovered the salamander. This ignorant and coarse man thought that so marvellous a being must be the devil's handiwork. For very fear, he threw her in the sea. But, as you can well believe, the beautiful creature was not drowned, and it was easy for her to join her good friend, Monsieur Descartes. She remained faithful to him as long as he lived, and on his death left this earth never to return.

'I quote this example, among many others, to acquaint you with the loves of philosophers and salamanders. These loves are too sublime to be subjected to contracts; and you will agree that the ridiculous pomp displayed in our marriages would be out of place in such unions. Truly, it would be a pretty thing if a bewigged notary and a fat priest were to put their noses into them! These gentlemen are fit only to put the seal to the vulgar union of man and woman. The nuptials of salamanders and sages are borne witness to in more august fashion. They are celebrated by the aerial peoples in airy navies, which, borne on gentle zephyrs, glide on invisible waves to the sound of harps, their poops bedecked with roses. But do not run away with the notion that because they are not inscribed in a thumbed register in a dirty sacristy such troths are not enduring, or may be broken with facility. They have for sureties the spirits who sport among the clouds whence flashes the lightning and falls the thunderbolt. I make revelations which will be of use to you, my son, for I have already recognized by indications not to be mistaken that you are destined for the bed of a salamander.'

'Alas, monsieur,' I cried, 'this destiny terrifies me, and my scruples on the subject are nearly as great as those of the Dutch captain who threw Monsieur Descartes's pretty friend into the sea. I cannot help thinking as did he that these aerial ladies are demons! I should fear to lose my soul for them, for, in fine, monsieur, such marriages are contrary to nature, and opposed to divine law. Would that Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, my good master, could hear you! I am quite certain that he would uphold me with good arguments against the seductions of your salamanders, and against your eloquence.'

'Abbé Coignard,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'translates Greek admirably. Let him stick to his books. He is no philosopher. As for you, my son, you argue with the feebleness of ignorance, and the weakness of your arguments annoys me. These unions, you say, are contrary to nature. What do you know about it? And what means would you have of knowing about it? How is it possible to distinguish what is natural from what is not?

Do we know enough of universal Isis to discern what is in accord with her and what runs counter to her? But let us put it better: nothing runs counter to her, and all is in accord with her, for nothing exists which does not enter into the play of her organism or follow the innumerable poses of her body. Whence, I ask you, could enemies come who would offend her? Nothing acts against her or without her, and forces that seem to work against her are but manifestations of her own life.

'Only the ignorant can have sufficient assurance to say whether an action is natural or not. But let us for a moment enter into their point of view and their prejudices, and pretend to allow that it is possible to commit acts against nature. Will these acts on that account be wicked and be condemned? I am prepared to hear on this point the common opinion of moralists who represent virtue as a restraint on instincts, an effort against the inclination that we all have in us, a struggle, in fact, against the original man. By their own showing, virtue is contrary to nature, and from this it proceeds that they cannot condemn an action, whatever it may be, for what it has in common with virtue.

'I have made this digression, my son, to the end that I might show you the pitiable frivolity of your arguments. I cannot insult you by believing that you have any remaining doubts on the innocence of the carnal intercourse that men may hold with salamanders. Know henceforth that, far from being forbidden by the laws of religion, such marriages are ordained by that law to the exclusion of all others. I will now give you manifest proofs of this.'

He stopped speaking, took his box from his pocket, and helped himself to a pinch of snuff.

Night had fallen. The moon shed her liquid light on the river which shimmered beneath it, touched, too, with the glancing light of the lamps. Flights of gnats swarmed round us in airy spirals. Shrill insect voices rose amid the universal silence. Such sweetness fell from heaven that the starlight seemed to be suffused with milk.

Monsieur d'Astarac continued in this wise:

'The Bible, my son, and principally the books of Moses,

contain great and useful truths. This opinion seems absurd and unreasonable in consequence of the treatment that theologians have meted out to what they call the Scriptures, which by their commentaries, explanations, and meditations they have made a manual of mistakes, a volume of absurdities, a store-house of imbecilities, a collection of lies, a string of follies, a school of ignorance, a treasury of everything inept, and the lumber-room for all stupidity and wickedness. You must know that it was in its origin a temple of celestial light.

'I have been fortunate enough to re-establish it in its pristine splendour. And truth compels me to state that Mosaïde has greatly helped me by his understanding of the language and alphabet of the Hebrews. But do not let us lose sight of our main subject. Learn, first of all, that the meaning of the Bible is figurative, and that the chief error of theologians has been to take literally what must be understood as symbolical. Bear that truth in mind throughout the rest of my discourse.

'When the demiurge we call Jehovah, who also possesses many other names since we apply to him generally all the terms expressing quantity and quality, had, I do not say created the world, for that would be a foolish thing to say, but made straight a little corner of the universe to make a dwelling-place for Adam and Eve, there were to be found in space creatures of a subtle nature which Jehovah had not formed—would have been incapable of forming. They were the work of various other demiurges more ancient than he and more cunning. His skill did not as yet go beyond that of a very able potter capable of moulding beings, such as we are, in clay, as you fashion pots. What I say of him is not to depreciate him, for such a work is still far beyond human power.

'But one cannot fail to notice the inferior quality of the work of the seven days. Jehovah worked, not in fire, which alone gives birth to the masterpieces of life, but in clay, wherefrom he could produce but the handiwork of a clever ceramist. We are nothing, my son, but animated pottery. One cannot reproach Jehovah with having any illusions about his work. If he found it good at first and

in the ardour of composition, he was not slow in recognizing his error, and the Bible is full of the expression of his discontent, which often grew to ill humour and sometimes even to anger. Never did artisan treat objects produced by his industry with more disgust and aversion. He thought of destroying them and, indeed, he drowned the greater part of them. The deluge, the memory of which has been preserved by the Jews, the Greeks, and the Chinese, proved a last deception for the unhappy demiurge who, soon recognizing the uselessness and ridiculousness of such violence, fell into discouragement and apathy, which has not ceased since the days of Noah but has progressed to the extreme degree of the present day. But I see I look too far ahead. It is the drawback of these vast subjects that one cannot confine oneself to them. Our mind, abandoning itself to them, acts like the children of the stars who pass at one bound from universe to universe.

'Let us return to the earthly paradise, where the demiurge had placed the two vessels shaped by his hand, Adam and Eve. They did not live alone there among the animals and plants. The spirits of the air created by the demiurges of the fire floated above them, and looked on them with curiosity mingled with sympathy and pity. It was just what Jehovah had foreseen. To his praise let it be said he had reckoned on the genii of the fire, to whom we can henceforth give their real names of elves and salamanders, to improve and complete his little figures of clay. He had said to himself in his prudence: "My Adam and Eve, opaque, and sealed in clay, lack air and light. I have not known how to give them wings. But, by uniting themselves with elves and salamanders, created by a demiurge more powerful and subtle than I, they will give birth to children who will descend from the people of light, as well as from the race of clay, and will bear in their turn children more luminous than themselves, until at last their posterity shall almost equal in beauty the sons and the daughters of the air and fire."

'Truly he had neglected nothing to draw the attention of the sylphs and salamanders to his Adam and Eve.

He had modelled the woman to the shape of an amphora with a harmony of curved lines which sufficed to show him a prince of geometers, and he succeeded in redeeming the coarseness of the material by the magnificence of the form. Adam he had moulded with a hand less light but firmer, shaping his body with such justness and according to such perfect proportions that, applied later by the Greeks to architecture, these lines and measurements made all the beauty of their temples.

'So you see, my son, Jehovah tried according to his powers to render his creatures worthy of the aerial embrace he hoped for them. I lay no stress on the pains he took to make these unions fruitful. The economy of the sexes bears sufficient witness to his wisdom in this respect. And at first he could congratulate himself on his cunning and address. I have said that the sylphs and salamanders looked on Adam and Eve with that curiosity, that sympathy, and that tenderness which are the first ingredients of love. They drew near, and were taken in the cunning snares which Jehovah had set, and spread for them in and on the bellying bodies of the amphorae. The first man and the first woman enjoyed for centuries the delectable embraces of the genii of the air, which preserved them in eternal youth.

'Such was their lot, such should still be ours. Why did the parents of the human race, tired of these sublime delights, seek illicit pleasure the one with the other? But what would you have, my son? Moulded in clay, they loved the mud whence they came. Alas, they knew one another, even as they had known the genii.

'This is what the demiurge had expressly forbidden them. Dreading, and with reason, that they would produce children heavy, dull, and earthbound as themselves, he had forbidden them, under strictest penalty, to approach one another. Such is the meaning of those words of Eve's: "But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." For you can well understand, my son, the apple which tempted the luckless Eve was not the fruit of the apple-tree, and therein lies an

allegory whose meaning I have explained to you. Although imperfect, and sometimes violent and capricious, Jehovah was a demiurge, and too intelligent to vex himself about an apple or a pomegranate. To uphold such extravagant imaginings one must be a bishop or a Capuchin. And the proof that the apple was what I have said it was is that Eve was visited with the punishment suited to her fault. It was not said to her, "In sorrow shalt thou eat of it," but, "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth." Now, what connection, I ask you, can there be between an apple and the pains of childbirth? On the contrary, the punishment is exactly fitted if the fault were such as I have explained it.

'There, my son, is the true explanation of original sin. It teaches you your duty, which is to keep away from women. The fondness which draws you to them is fatal. All children born in this fashion are foolish and wretched.'

'But, monsieur,' I cried, stupefied, 'is another way, then, possible?'

'Happily,' he said, 'a great many are born from the union of men with the genii of the air. And such are clever and beautiful. Thus were born the giants spoken of by Hesiod and Moses. Thus was born Pythagoras, whom the salamander, his mother, endowed with a golden thigh. Thus was born Alexander the Great, said to be the son of Olympias and a serpent. Scipio Africanus, Aristomenes of Messenia,[1] Julius Caesar, Porphyry,[2] the Emperor Julian who re-established the worship of fire, abolished by Constantine the Apostate; Merlin the wizard, born of a sylph and a nun, daughter of Charlemagne; St Thomas Aquinas, Paracelsus, and, more recently, Monsieur Van Helmont.'

I promised Monsieur d'Astarac, as this was the case, to lend myself to the advances of a salamander, could one be found so obliging as to wish for me. He assured me I should not only find one, but twenty or thirty, among whom I should have but the difficulty of choosing. And, less by desire to put it to the test than to please him, I

[1] General, seventh century B.C.
[2] Neoplatonic philosopher, 234–304.

asked the philosopher how it was possible to put oneself in communication with these aerial beings.

'Nothing is easier,' he replied. 'It needs but a crystal ball, whose use I will explain to you. I keep by me a fairly large number of these balls, and I will give you all the necessary directions before long in my study. But that is enough for to-day.'

He rose and moved to the boat, where the ferryman awaited us, stretched on his back and snoring to the moon. Once we had reached the bank he moved off swiftly, and was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

XIII

This long interview left me with the confused feeling of a dream; I was more alive to the thought of Catherine. In spite of the sublimities that I had been hearing, I longed to see her, and that although I had not supped, I was not so penetrated by the philosopher's notions that I was in any way out of taste with this pretty girl. I was resolved to push my good fortune to a finish before falling to the possession of one of those handsome furies of the air who allowed no earthly rivals. My dread was lest, at so late an hour of the night, Catherine should be tired of waiting for me. Making my way along the river and crossing the Pont Royal at full speed, I rushed down the rue du Bac. A minute later I reached the rue de Grenelle, where I heard cries mingled with the clash of swords. The noise came from the house Catherine had described to me. There, on the pavement, shadows and lanterns were flickering and voices arose:

'Help, Jesus! They are murdering me!—Have at the monk! Go it! At him!—Jesus, Mary, help!—Look at the precious rascal! Have at him! At him, boys, at him! Let him have it!'

Windows opened in the surrounding houses and heads appeared in night-caps.

All this tumult and rout passed suddenly before me like

a chase in the forest, and I recognized Brother Ange, who was making off with such speed that he kicked himself with his sandalled feet as he ran, while three great strapping lackeys, armed like the Swiss guard, pressing him close, pricked his hide with the points of their halberds. Their master, a young gentleman, thick-set and red of face, ceased not to encourage them with voice and gesture, as one sets on the hounds.

'At him! At him! Strike home! He 's a tough brute!'

When he was near me, I said:

'Ah, monsieur, you have no pity!'

'Monsieur,' he replied, 'obviously it is not your mistress this Capuchin has caressed, and it was not you who surprised madame here in the arms of this malodorous beast. Her financier is all very well—there are things that are understood. But a monk is not to be endured. Look at the bold, impudent hussy.'

And he showed me Catherine in her gown in the doorway, her eyes glittering with tears, dishevelled, wringing her hands, more beautiful than I had ever seen her, and murmuring in a languishing voice which cut me to the heart:

'Do not kill him! It is Brother Ange, it is the little brother.'

The ruffianly lackeys came back announcing they had given up the chase on seeing the watch, but not without having first stuck their pikes half a finger deep in the back of the holy man. The night-caps disappeared from the windows, which shut again, and while the young gentleman talked with his men I approached Catherine, whose tears were drying on her cheeks in the pretty creases of her smile.

'The poor brother has escaped,' she said. 'But I trembled for him. Men are terrible. When they love you, they will listen to nothing.'

'Catherine,' I replied, rather piqued, 'did you ask me to come here merely to assist at your friends' quarrels? Alas, I have no right to take part in them!'

'You would have, Monsieur Jacques, you would have, if you had wished.'

'But,' I said again, 'you are the most sought-after person in all Paris. You had not spoken to me at all of this young gentleman.'

'Neither did I think of him. He came unexpectedly.'

'And he surprised you with Brother Ange.'

'He thought he saw what did not exist. He is so hot-headed and will not listen to reason.'

Her night-gown, half open, showed amid its lace a bosom full as a ripe fruit and flowering to a rose-bud. I took her in my arms and covered her breast with kisses.

'Heavens!' she cried. 'And in the street too, before Monsieur d'Anquetil, who is looking at us!'

'Who is he, Monsieur d'Anquetil?'

'The murderer of Brother Ange, to be sure! Who else do you suppose?'

'Truly, Catherine, others are not needful; your friends are gathered round you in sufficient force.'

'Monsieur Jacques, I pray you, do not insult me!'

'I am not insulting you, Catherine, I acknowledge your attractions, to which I do but wish to pay the same homage as so many others.'

'Monsieur Jacques, what you say smells odiously of your good father's cook-shop.'

'You were formerly well content, Mam'selle Catherine, to smell that smoke.'

'Fie, you villain! You mean wretch! To insult a woman!'

As she began to screech and to get excited, Monsieur d'Anquetil left his men and came to us, pushed her into the house, calling her a shameless hussy and a good-for-nothing, followed her into the passage, and shut the door in my face.

XIV

THE thought of Catherine filled my mind during the whole week following this unlucky adventure. Her likeness shone on the leaves of the folios over which I bent in the library beside my good master; so much so that Photius,

Olympiodorus, Fabricius, and Vossius spoke to me but of a little lady in a lace night-gown. These visions inclined me to idleness. But, indulgent to others as to himself, Monsieur Jérôme Coignard smiled benevolently on my trouble and distraction.

'Jacques Tournebroche,' the good man said to me one day, 'are you not struck by the variations of the moral law throughout the ages? The books gathered together in this admirable Astaracian library bear witness to man's uncertainty on this subject. If I offer some reflections thereon, my son, it is to fix in your mind this sound and salutary thought that there is no good conduct outside religion, and that the maxims of the philosophers who pretend to set up a code of natural morals are but whim-whams and crotchets. The wherefore for right conduct is not to be found in nature which, of itself, is indifferent, ignoring evil as well as good. It is written in the Holy Scriptures that one must not transgress, at least not without suitably repenting afterwards. Human laws are founded on utility, and that can be but apparent and illusive utility, for one does not know instinctively what is of use to man or what really befits him. And again, in our common law, a good part of the articles are born of prejudice alone. Upheld by the threat of punishment, human laws may be eluded by ruse and dissimulation. Every man capable of thought is above them. They are, in fact, but snares for the foolish.

'Such is not the case, my son, with divine laws. These latter are imprescriptible, ineluctable, and stable. Their absurdity is but apparent, and hides a wisdom we cannot grasp. If they offend our reason, it is because they are superior to it and because they accord with the true ends of man, and not with the ends which are apparent to him. It is well to observe them when one is fortunate enough to recognize them. At the same time, I make no difficulty of confessing that the keeping of these laws, contained in the Decalogue and in the commandments of the Church, is difficult at most times, and even impossible without the grace which is often delayed, since it is our duty to long for it. Hence we are all miserable sinners.

'And here it is that we should admire the system of the Christian faith, which bases salvation principally upon repentance. It is to be observed, my son, that the greatest saints are penitents, and, as repentance is in proportion to the fault, in the greatest sinners is found the stuff of the greatest saints. I could illustrate this doctrine with a great number of admirable examples, but I have said enough to make you understand that the primary substance of saintliness is concupiscence, incontinence, every impurity of the flesh and spirit. It needs but, having collected your material together, to work it up according to the theological art, to shape it, so to speak, into the form of repentance, which is the affair of years, of days, and sometimes even of a single moment, as may be seen in the case of perfect contrition. Jacques Tournebroche, if you have rightly understood me, you will not wear yourself out in wretched efforts to become an honest man according to the way of the world, and you will apply yourself solely to the satisfying of divine justice.'

I did not fail to recognize the great wisdom enshrined in the maxims of my good master. I only feared that this morality, were it followed without discrimination, would bring upon men the worst disorders. I imparted my doubts to Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, who reassured me as follows:

'Jacobus Tournebroche, you take no notice of what I have just particularly told you, to wit, that what you call disorders are such in fact only in the opinion of lawyers and judges whether civil or ecclesiastical, and in reference to human laws, which are arbitrary and transitory, and, in a word, that to live according to these laws is the mark of a sheep-like intelligence. A man of parts does not pride himself on acting according to the laws in force at the Châtelet and in the ecclesiastical court. He only concerns himself with the salvation of his soul, and he does not think himself dishonoured if he gets to heaven by some of the crooked paths followed by the greatest saints. If the blessed Pelagia had not practised the profession by which you know Jeannette, the hurdy-gurdy player,

gains her livelihood under the porch of Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné, that saint would not have had occasion for her full and ample repentance, and it is extremely probable that, after having lived as a matron in ordinary and commonplace uprightness, she would not at this moment be playing the psaltery before the tabernacle where the Holy of holies rests in glory. Do you call so beautiful a dispensation of a predestinated life disorder? Not so! Let us leave such base figures of speech to the lieutenant of police, who, after his death, will not perhaps find the meanest place behind the wretched woman that he drags ignominiously to-day to the reformatory. Save the loss of one's soul and eternal damnation, there can neither be disorder nor crime, nor any evil in this perishable world, where everything must be adjusted and governed with an eye to the world to come. Admit, then, Tournebroche my son, that acts the most reprehensible in man's opinion may lead to a good result, and do not try any longer to reconcile the justice of men with that of God, which alone is just, not indeed to our perceptions but in its decisions. For the moment, you will oblige me, my son, by looking up in Vossius the meaning of five or six obscure terms employed by the Panopolitan, with whom one must wrestle in the darkness in the insidious manner which dismayed even the great heart of Ajax, according to Homer, prince of poets and historians. These old alchemists had a rough-hewn style; Manilius, if Monsieur d'Astarac does not mind my saying so, wrote on these same subjects with more elegance.'

My good master had scarcely uttered these last words when a shadow rose between us. It was that of Monsieur d'Astarac, or rather it was Monsieur d'Astarac himself, thin and black as a shadow.

Whether he had not overheard these words, or whether he disdained to notice them, he showed no resentment; on the contrary, he congratulated Monsieur Jérôme Coignard on his zeal and knowledge, and he added that he counted on his insight for the completion of the greatest work ever undertaken by man. Then, turning to me, he said:

'My son, I beg you to come down to my study for a moment, where I wish to communicate to you a secret of some importance.'

I followed him into the room where he had first received us, my good master and myself, the day he took us both into his service. I found once again standing against the walls the old Egyptians with their gilded faces. A glass globe, the size of a pumpkin, stood on the table. Monsieur d'Astarac let himself drop on to a sofa, signed to me to sit down in front of him, and, having passed his hand, loaded with precious stones and amulets, across his brow, said:

'My son, I do not do you the injustice of thinking that after our interview on the Isle of Swans you can still have any doubt as to the existence of sylphs and salamanders, which is just as real as that of men, and even much more so if one counts its reality by the duration of the apparitions through which it shows itself, for their life is far longer than ours. Salamanders carry their unchangeable youth from century to century; some of them have seen Noah, Menes,[1] and Pythagoras. The plenitude of their remembrances and the freshness of their memory make their conversation extremely attractive. It has even been maintained that they acquired their immortality in the arms of mortals, and that the hope of avoiding death drew them to the couch of philosophers. But these are falsehoods which cannot deceive a reflective mind. Every union of the sexes, far from assuring immortality to lovers, is an evidence of death, and we should never know love, were we destined to live for ever. It cannot be otherwise for the salamanders, who seek in the arms of the sages but one kind of immortality—that of the race. It is also the only one that it is reasonable to hope for. And although I have promised myself, with the help of science, notably to prolong human life, and to spread it over five or six centuries at least, I have never flattered myself that I could ensure its duration indefinitely. It would be insensate to combat the natural law. Reject, therefore, my son, as vain tales, the idea of immortality

[1] Legendary first king of Egypt.

drawn from a kiss. It is the shame of various cabbalists ever to have thought such a thing. It is none the less true that salamanders are inclined to the love of man. You will have experience of it without delay. I have sufficiently prepared you for their visit and since you have had, from the night of your initiation, no impure dealings with women, you shall now receive the reward of your continence.'

My candid nature suffered uneasily a praise that I merited in spite of myself, and I thought of owning my culpable desires to Monsieur d'Astarac. But he left me no time to confess, and continued with vivacity:

'There only remains to give you the key, my son, which will open to you the empire of the genii. And I will do it forthwith.'

And, getting up, he put his hand on the globe which occupied half the table.

'This ball,' he said, 'is full of a star dust which escapes your sight by its very purity. For it is far too fine to be palpable to the gross senses of man. So it is, my son, that the more beautiful side of the universe hides itself from our vision, and only reveals itself to the savant who is furnished with the apparatus proper to discover it. The rivers and the plains of the air, for instance, remain invisible to you, though in reality they are a thousand times more rich and varied in aspect than those of the most beautiful of earthly landscapes.

'Know, then, that in this globe there is a star dust of sovereign property to exalt the fire that is within us. And the effect of this exaltation makes itself felt at once. It consists in a subtlety of the senses which enables us to see and to touch the aerial shapes floating round about us. As soon as you have broken the seal which closes the opening of this globe, and inhaled the star dust which will escape therefrom, you will find in this room one or more creatures like women in the system of curved lines which form their bodies, but far more beautiful than ever woman was, and who are, in truth, salamanders. There is no doubt that the one which I saw last year in your father's cook-shop will appear to you first, for she has a liking for

you, and I would advise you to satisfy her desires as soon as possible. So sit down comfortably in this arm-chair before the table, uncork the globe, and inhale its contents gently. You will soon see all that I have described to you take shape by degrees. I will now leave you. Farewell.'

And he disappeared after his fashion, which was strangely sudden. I remained alone, before this globe of glass, hesitating to uncork it for fear that some stupefying exhalation should escape. I thought that perhaps Monsieur d'Astarac might have introduced therein, according to his art, some vapour which should send to sleep those who breathed it and set them dreaming of salamanders. I was not yet philosopher enough to care to be happy in such fashion. Perhaps, I said to myself, these fumes induce madness. In fact, I was distrustful enough to think for a moment of going to the library to ask advice of my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard. But I recognized immediately that it would be taking useless trouble. As soon as he heard me speak, I told myself, of star dust and genii of the air, he would reply: 'Jacques Tournebroche, my son, be mindful never to put faith in absurdities, but to bring everything to the test of your reason, save in the matter of our holy religion. Let be these globes and powders along with all the other follies of the cabbala and the spagyric art.'

I thought I could hear him making this little speech between two pinches of snuff, and I knew not what to reply to such Christian language. On the other hand, I foresaw and considered in what embarrassment I should find myself before Monsieur d'Astarac when he asked of me news of the salamander. What should I reply to him? How could I confess my reserve and my abstention, without at the same time betraying my suspicion and my fear? And, then, in spite of myself, I was curious to try such an adventure. I am not credulous. On the contrary, I have a prodigious leaning to doubt, and this propensity induces me to defy common sense and even evidence along with it. To everything that is told me I say to myself: 'Why not?' Before the crystal globe this 'why not' did

insult to my natural intelligence. This 'why not' inclined me to credulity, and it is worthy of note here, that to believe nothing is to believe everything, and that one must not keep too open and free a mind lest it should become a storehouse for adventure, and stuff should lodge there of extravagant form and weight which could find no place in minds sensibly and ordinarily furnished with beliefs. While with my hand on the wax seal I remembered what my mother had told me of magic bottles, my 'why not' whispered to me that perchance after all one might see in this star dust aerial sprites. But as soon as this notion, having set foot in my mind, inclined to lodge there and settle down, I found it odd, absurd, and grotesque. Ideas, when they lay hold of one, soon become impertinent. Few of them are capable of being anything but passing fancies, and certainly this one had an air of folly. While I still asked myself: 'Shall I open it? Shall I not open it?' the seal, which I had not ceased to press between my fingers, broke suddenly in my hand, and, behold, the bottle was uncorked!

I waited and I watched. I saw nothing and I felt nothing. I felt cheated, so facile and prompt to slip into our minds is the hope of overreaching nature! Nothing! Not even a vague or confused illusion, an uncertain image! What I had foreseen had happened. What a deception! I felt a kind of chagrin. Lying back in my arm-chair, I swore to myself, before the surrounding Egyptians with their long black eyes, to shut my mind closer in future to the lies of cabbalists. Once again, I acknowledged the wisdom of my good master and I resolved, on his example, to guide myself by reason in all matters not relating to the Christian and Catholic faith. To have expected the visit of a salamander lady, what a simpleton! Could there possibly be salamanders? But what does one know of such things? and 'Why not?'

The atmosphere, heavy since midday, was become overpowering. Torpid from long, peaceful, and secluded days, I felt a weight on my brow and on my eyelids. The coming storm quite bore me down. I let my arms fall, and, with head thrown back and closed eyes, I slid into a

half-slumber full of gilded Egyptians and lascivious shades. This uncertain condition, during which the feeling of love burnt in me as a fire in the night, lasted for I know not how long, when I was awakened by a light sound of steps and of rustling material. I opened my eyes and gave a loud cry.

A marvellous creature stood before me, robed in black satin, her hair decked with lace, dark, with blue eyes, well-marked features, a young, pure skin, rounded cheeks, and a mouth breathing an invisible kiss. Her short dress showed little feet, light and instinct with gaiety and movement. She held herself erect, rounded, and a trifle thickset in her voluptuous perfection. One could see a small square of her neck under the velvet band tied round her throat, and it was dark but dazzling. She looked at me with an air of curiosity.

I have said that my sleep had given me thoughts of love. I got up. I sprang towards her.

'Excuse me,' she said, 'I was looking for Monsieur d'Astarac.'

I replied:

'Madame, there is no question of Monsieur d'Astarac. There is but you and I. I was waiting for you. You are my salamander. I have opened the crystal bottle. You have come. You are mine.'

I took her in my arms and covered with kisses all of her that my lips could meet above the opening of her bodice.

She disengaged herself and said:

'You are mad.'

'It is very natural,' said I; 'who would not be, in my place?'

She looked down, blushed, and smiled. I threw myself at her feet.

'Since Monsieur d'Astarac is not here,' she said, 'I must withdraw.'

'Stay,' I cried, and bolted the door.

She asked me:

'Do you know if he will return shortly?'

'No, madame, he will not come back for long enough. He has left me alone with the salamanders. I desire but one. It is you.'

I took her in my arms, I bore her to the sofa, I dropped down with her, I covered her with kisses, I was no longer conscious of myself. She cried out, I did not listen to her. Her open palms repulsed me, her nails scratched me, and her vain defence but sharpened my desires. I clasped her, I enfolded her, overborne and undone. Her yielding body ceded to me, she closed her eyes. I soon felt, in my triumph, her beautiful arms forgivingly enfold me.

Then, unlocked, alas, from this delicious embrace, we looked at one another with surprise. Anxious to recover her propriety, she smoothed her skirts and was silent.

'I love you,' said I. 'What is your name?'

I did not think she was a salamander and, truth to tell, I had never really thought so.

'I am called Jael,' she said.

'What! you are Mosaïde's niece?'

'Yes, but say nothing. If he knew——'

'What would he do?'

'Oh, nothing to me. But much harm to you. He does not love Christians.'

'And you!'

'Oh, as for me, I do not love Jews.'

'Jael, do you love me a little?'

'It seems to me, monsieur, after what we have expressed to one another, that your question is an insult.'

'It is true, mademoiselle, but I hope that you will pardon a haste and an ardour which were not careful to consult your feelings.'

'Oh, monsieur, do not make yourself out more guilty than you are. All your violence and all your ardour would not have served you had you not pleased me. A moment ago, seeing you asleep in that arm-chair, I thought you deserving. I awaited your awakening, and you know the rest.'

I answered her with a kiss. She returned it. What a kiss! I thought wild wood-strawberries were melting in my mouth! My desires reawoke, and I pressed her ardently against my heart.

'This time,' she said, 'do not let yourself be so carried away, and do not think only of yourself. One must not

be an egoist in love. That is what young men do not well understand. But one teaches them.'

We dived again into the depths of delight. Afterwards the adorable Jael said to me:

'Have you a comb? I look like a witch.'

'Jael,' I said, 'I have no comb; I was expecting a salamander. I adore you.'

'Adore me, my friend, but with discretion. You do not know Mosaïde.'

'Why, Jael, is he so terrifying, at a hundred and thirty years of age, and seventy-five of them passed in a pyramid?'

'I see, my friend, that you have heard tales about my uncle, and that you have been simple enough to believe them. Nobody knows his age; I am ignorant of it myself. He has been old as long as I have known him. I only know that he is robust and of no common strength. He was a banker at Lisbon, where he happened to kill a Christian whom he had surprised with my aunt Miriam. He fled and took me with him. Since then he has borne a mother's love towards me. He talks to me as one talks to little children, and he weeps as he watches me sleep.'

'Do you dwell with him?'

'Yes, in the keeper's cottage at the other end of the park.'

'I know, one follows the mandragora path. How comes it I have not met you before? By what melancholy chance have I, although so near to you, lived without seeing you? But do I say lived? Is it life to live without knowing you? You are kept close then in this cottage?'

'It is true that I live very secludedly, and that I cannot go for walks or shopping or to the play as I should like. Mosaïde's affection for me allows me no freedom. He guards me jealously, and in all the world he loves but me, and six little gold cups that he brought from Lisbon. As he is far more attached to me than he was to my aunt Miriam, he would kill you, my friend, with a better will than he killed the Portuguese. I warn you of it to make you discreet, and because it is not a consideration which will give pause to a man of mettle. Are you a man of quality and born of a good family?'

'Alas, no,' I replied, 'my father practises one of the mechanic arts, and is in a kind of business.'

'Is he in the Revenue? Has he any office of profit? No? That 's a pity. So one must love you for yourself alone. But, tell me the truth, will not Monsieur d'Astarac soon be here?'

At this name, at this query, a horrible doubt crossed my mind. I suspected that this ravishing Jael had been sent by the cabbalist to play the role of a salamander to me. I even secretly accused her of playing the nymph to this old madman. To be immediately enlightened on the subject, I asked her roughly, if she were in the habit of playing the salamander in the castle.

'I fail to understand you,' she answered, looking at me with eyes full of innocent surprise. 'You speak like Monsieur d'Astarac himself, and I should think you infected with his complaint had I not proved that you do not share his aversion to women. He cannot abide them, and it is a real embarrassment to me to see him and to speak to him. Nevertheless, I was looking for him a short time ago when I found you.'

In my joy at being thus reassured I covered her with kisses. She managed to let me see that she wore black stockings, fastened above the knee with diamond-buckled garters, and the sight of them turned my mind to fancies which pleased her. On her side, she led me on with much skill and ardour, and I felt the spirit of play beginning to wake in her at a moment when I began to weary of it. However, I did my best and was again happy in being able to spare this delightful person the affront that she least deserved. It seemed to me she was not ill-pleased with me. She rose up with a tranquil mien and said:

'Do you not really know whether Monsieur d'Astarac will soon be back? I will confess to you I came to ask him for a small sum of money owing on my uncle's pension, of which for the moment I am in great need.'

I apologetically took three crowns from my purse, which she did me the kindness to accept. It was all that was left to me from the too rare generosities of the

cabbalist, who, professing to disdain money, unluckily forgot to pay my wages.

I asked Mademoiselle Jael if I should not have the good fortune to see her again.

'You shall,' she said.

And we arranged that she should come to my room at night whenever she could make her escape from the cottage where she was kept.

'Only take care,' I said, 'my door is the fourth on the right in the corridor, and the fifth is that of my good master, Abbé Coignard. The others,' I added, 'merely lead to the attics, which accommodate two or three of the scullions and many hundreds of rats.'

She assured me she would take care to make no mistake, and that she would tap at my door and no other.

'For the matter of that, your Abbé Coignard seems to me to be a very good sort of man. I think we have nothing to fear from him. I saw him through a peephole the day he came with you to see my uncle. He seemed to be amiable, though I could scarcely hear what he said. His nose, in particular, seemed clever and capable. He who bears it must be a man of resource, and I should like to make his acquaintance. There is always something to be had from the society of men of parts. I am only sorry that he displeased my uncle by his freedom of speech and his jesting humour. Mosaïde hates him, and he has a capacity for hatred quite unimaginable by a Christian.'

'Mademoiselle,' I replied, 'Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard is a very learned man, and he is, moreover, a philosopher and a benevolent one. He knows the world, and you are right in thinking his counsel worthy of following. I live entirely under his guidance. But, tell me, did you not see me also that day from your peephole in the cottage?'

'I saw you,' she said, 'and I will not deny that I singled you out. But I must return to my uncle. Farewell.'

Monsieur d'Astarac did not fail to ask me that night after supper for news of the salamander. His curiosity embarrassed me not a little. I answered that the meeting

had surpassed my hopes, but that beyond that I thought it my duty to keep the reserve fitting in adventures of the kind.

'This discretion, my son,' he said, 'is not as necessary as you think. Salamanders do not require secrecy on the subject of amours, of which they are not ashamed. One of these nymphs, who loves me, has no dearer pastime in my absence than to cut my initials entwined with hers on the bark of the trees, as you may satisfy yourself by examining the trunks of five or six pines whose graceful tops you can see from here. But have you not noticed, my son, that this kind of love, so truly sublime, far from leaving one fatigued, imparts fresh vigour to the heart? I am sure that after what has passed you will busy yourself to-night by translating at least sixty pages of Zozimus, the Panopolitan.'

I confessed that, on the contrary, I felt a great desire to sleep, which he explained by the surprise of a first interview. And so the great man rested assured that I had had dealings with a salamander. I felt scruples about deceiving him, but I was obliged to, and, indeed, he so deceived himself that one could scarcely add much to his illusions. So I sought my couch in peace of mind; and, having got into bed, I blew out my candle and closed the sweetest day of my life.

XV

JAEL kept her word. No later than the day after the morrow she came tapping at my door. We were much more at home in my room than we had been in Monsieur d'Astarac's study, and what took place at our first meeting was but child's play compared to what love inspired us with at our second. She tore herself from my arms at the break of day with a thousand vows to join me soon again, calling me her life, her soul, and her pet.

I got up very late that day. When I went down to the library my good master was seated before the papyrus of Zozimus, his pen in one hand, his magnifying glass in the

other, and worthy the admiration of any one who can appreciate learning and letters.

'Jacques Tournebroche,' he said to me, 'the principal difficulty in reading this lies in the fact that various of the letters may easily be confounded with others, and it is needful to success in deciphering it, to draw up a table of the characters which lend themselves to mistakes of the kind; for unless we take this precaution we run the risk of wrong readings, to our eternal shame and just vilification. I have made some laughable blunders this very day since matins. I must have had my mind distracted by what I saw last night, which I will tell you about.

'Having woke up in the early dawn, I felt a desire for a draught of that light white wine which, you will remember, I complimented Monsieur d'Astarac on yesterday. For there is a sympathy, my son, between white wine and cock-crow dating certainly from the time of Noah, and I feel certain that if St Peter, during the cursed night he spent in the courtyard of the high priest, had drunk a toothful of clear Moselle wine or even that of Orleans, he would not have denied Jesus before the cock crew twice. But we must in no wise regret this ill deed, my son, for it was necessary that the prophecies should be fulfilled; and if Peter, or Cephas, as he was called, had not that night committed the worst of infamies he would not be to-day the greatest saint in Paradise and the corner-stone of our holy Church, to the utter confusion of people whom the world calls good, who see the keys of their eternal happiness held by a cowardly good-for-nothing. O wholesome example, which draws man from the fallacious inspirations of human honour and leads him into the ways of salvation! O wise system of religion! O divine wisdom, which exalteth the humble and meek and putteth down the mighty! O marvel! O mystery!

'To the eternal shame of the Pharisees and lawyers, a rough fisherman from the lake of Tiberias, who, by his utter cowardice had become the laughing-stock of the wenches in the high priest's kitchen, where they warmed themselves side by side, a boor and a coward who denied his Master and his faith before dirty wenches far less pretty

than the maid of the bailiff's wife at Séez, wears on his brow the triple crown, on his finger the pontifical ring, is set above the princes of the Church, kings, and emperor, and is invested with the power to bind and to loose; the most respectable man, the most worthy woman, can enter heaven only if he gives them access to it. But tell me, Tournebroche, my son, how far had I got in my narrative when I lost the thread running after the great St Peter, prince of apostles. I am almost sure I was speaking of a glass of white wine that I drank at dawn. I went down in my night-shirt to the store-room and drew from a certain cupboard, of which I had thoughtfully obtained the key the night before, a bottle, which I emptied with enjoyment. Afterwards, on going upstairs, I met between the second and third floors a little lady in white, who was going down. She seemed very frightened and fled to the end of the corridor. I followed her, I caught her up, I seized her in my arms and kissed her, suddenly and irresistibly attracted by her. Do not blame me, my son, you would have done the same in my place, perhaps even more. She was a pretty girl, she was like the bailiff's wife's maid, but with more sparkle in her eye. She did not dare cry out. She whispered in my ear: "Let me go! Let me go! you are mad!" Look, Tournebroche, I still bear the marks of her nails on my wrists. Would I had kept the impression of her kiss as vividly on my lips!'

'What, Monsieur l'Abbé,' I exclaimed, 'she gave you a kiss?'

'Rest assured, my son,' replied my good master, 'that had you been in my place you would have received one as good, had you seized the opportunity as I did. I think I told you that I held the young lady in a close embrace. She tried to get away, she stifled her cries, she murmured lamentations. "I beseech you to let me go. Here is the dawn, a moment longer and I am lost." Her fears, her terror, her peril, what savage would not have been touched by them? I am not inhuman. I gave her her liberty at the price of a kiss which she gave me at once. I give you my word I have never received a more delicious one.'

At this point of his story my good master looked up to

inhale a pinch of snuff and saw my trouble and my distress, which he took for surprise.

'Jacques Tournebroche,' he continued, 'what I have still to tell you will surprise you even more. With regret I let the pretty lady go, but my curiosity impelled me to follow her. I went downstairs after her. I saw her cross the vestibule, go out by the little door which opens on to the fields, on the side where the park extends farthest, and run down the path. I ran after her. I thought she could not go far in night-gown and night-cap. She took the mandragora path. My curiosity redoubled and I followed her as far as Mosaïde's cottage. At that moment that wicked Jew appeared at his window, in his robe and great cap, like those figures you see appear when midday strikes on old clocks, more ridiculous and Gothic than are the churches which preserve them for the pleasure of the country bumpkins and the profit of the verger.

'He discovered me under the foliage at the very moment when the pretty girl, swift as Galatea herself, slipped into the cottage. So that I had exactly the appearance of pursuing her in the manner and style of the satyrs we spoke of one day when discussing some fine passages in Ovid. And my dress helped the likeness, for, I think I told you, my son, I was in my night-shirt. At the sight of me Mosaïde's eyes glittered. He drew from his dirty yellow cloak a rather neat stiletto and brandished it out of the window with an arm which seemed by no means weighed down with age. Meanwhile he swore at me bilingually. Yes, Tournebroche, my knowledge of grammar authorizes me to state that his curses were bilingual, and Spanish, or rather Portuguese, was mingled with Hebrew. It angered me that I could not catch the exact meaning, for I do not understand these languages, although I can recognize them by certain sounds which constantly recur. But it is very likely that he accused me of corrupting this girl who is, I believe, his niece, Jael, whom Monsieur d'Astarac, you may remember, had mentioned to us several times. Wherein his invectives conveyed something of flattery; for such as I have become, my son, what with the passing of time and the fatigues of a troubled life, I do not pretend

any longer to the love of young maidens. Alas, unless I become a bishop, it is a dish whose flavour I shall never know again. I regret it. But one must not be too strongly attached to the perishable things of this world, and we must renounce what renounces us. Mosaïde, then, handling his stiletto, poured from his throat hoarse sounds alternating with shrill screeches, so that I was insulted and vituperated in form of chant or plainsong. And without vanity, my son, I may say I was called a corrupter and a loose fellow in a solemn and ceremonious tone. When Mosaïde came to the end of his imprecations, I endeavoured to make a retort bilingual, like the attack. I accused him in Latin and in French of homicide and sacrilege, of having cut the throats of little children and stabbed the sacred Host. The fresh morning breezes, playing round my legs, reminded me that I was in my night-shirt. I felt somewhat embarrassed, for it was very evident, my son, that a man who wears no breeches is in a poor position to explain the sacred truths, to confound error and follow up crime. All the same, I drew him a terrible picture of his outrages and menaced him with both divine and human justice.'

'What! my good master,' I cried, 'this Mosaïde, who has so pretty a niece, has cut the throats of new-born children and stabbed the sacred Host?'

'I know nothing of that,' replied Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, 'and can know nothing of it. But those crimes are his, being those of his race, and I may attribute them to him without doing him wrong. I followed this up with a long list of scoundrelly ancestors for the old wretch. For you are not ignorant of what is said of the Jews and their abominable rites. In the old Nuremberg chronicle there is a plate representing Jews mutilating a child, and they are recognizable by the round patch they wear on their garments as a badge of infamy. Nevertheless, I do not think it was an everyday and household usage among them. I also doubt whether all these Jews are thus given to outraging the sacred elements. To accuse them of it, is to believe them as deeply penetrated as ourselves with the divinity of our Lord Jesus Christ.

For one cannot imagine sacrilege without faith, and the Jew who stabbed the sacred Host rendered thus a sincere homage to the truth of transubstantiation. Those are all fables we may leave to the ignorant, my son, and, if I threw them in the face of that horrible Mosaïde, it was less from the considered beliefs of a sound scholarship than from the swift promptings of resentment and anger.'

'Ah, monsieur,' I replied, 'you might have satisfied yourself with reproaching him with the Portuguese he killed from jealousy, for that was a real murder.'

'What!' exclaimed my good master. 'Mosaïde has killed a Christian? Tournebroche, we have in him a dangerous neighbour. But you will draw the conclusion that I myself draw from this adventure. It is certain that his niece is Monsieur d'Astarac's light of love, whose room she was surely leaving when I met her on the stairs.

'I have too much religion not to regret that such a charming person should belong to the race which crucified Jesus Christ. Alas, there is no room for doubt, my son, this wicked Mordecai is uncle to an Esther who has no need to bathe for six months in myrrh before she is worthy of the couch of a king. This magic-working old crow is not at all suitable for such a beauty, and I feel an interest in her waking in me.

'Mosaïde must hide her with the utmost secrecy, for were she seen one day on the Cours or at the play, she would have all the world at her feet on the morrow. Do you not wish to see her, Tournebroche?'

I replied that I should like to very much, and we buried ourselves once more in our Greek.

XVI

THAT evening, my good master and I finding ourselves in the rue du Bac, he said to me, for it was a warm night:

'Jacques Tournebroche, my son, how would it suit you to turn up here to the left, up the rue de Grenelle, and look

for a cabaret? We must also find a landlord who sells wine at a penny the pot, for I am devoid of money, and I think you are no better provided than I am, my son, through the fault of Monsieur d'Astarac, who may make gold but who gives none to his servants and his secretaries, as far as can be seen in our case. The state he leaves us in is distressing. I am not worth a halfpenny, and I see that my own industry or cunning must make good this formidable ill. It is very fine to bear poverty with an equal mind, as did Epictetus, who gained thereby an imperishable glory. But it is a practice I am tired of, and it has become tedious by its very sameness. I feel it is high time that I tried some other virtue, and that I practised myself in the art of possessing wealth without wealth possessing me, which is a very noble state of things, and the best that a philosopher can attain to. I would gladly come by something, were it only to show that my wits did not desert me even in prosperity. I seek the means, you see me pondering thereon, Tournebroche, my son.'

While my good master was speaking in this elegant fashion we approached the pretty house where Monsieur de la Guéritaude had established Catherine. 'You will know it,' she had said to me, 'by the roses on the balcony.' It was not light enough for me to see the roses, but I thought I could smell them. A few paces farther and I recognized her at the window, a jug of water in her hand, watering her flowers. At the same moment she recognized me in the street below, and she laughed and blew me a kiss. Whereupon a hand, appearing at the window, gave her a smack on the cheek which so surprised her that she dropped the jug of water, which all but fell on my good master's head. Then the buffeted fair one disappeared, and the buffeter, taking her place at the window, leant over the railing and called out:

'God be praised that you are not the Capuchin! I cannot endure my mistress blowing kisses to that evil-smelling beast who prowls for ever under the window. At least I need not blush for her taste this time. You seem to me to be an honest fellow, and I think that I have seen you before. Do me the honour to come up. There

is supper prepared within. You will do me pleasure if you will share it, along with Monsieur l'Abbé there, who has just received a potful of water on his head and is shaking himself like a wet dog. After supper we will play cards, and as soon as it is light we will go and cut each other's throats. But that will be out of pure politeness and only to do you honour, monsieur, for, truth to tell, this young woman is not worth a sword-thrust. She is a hussy whom I never wish to see again.'

I recognized him who spoke thus as Monsieur d'Anquetil, whom I had lately seen encouraging his men as actively to prick Brother Ange in the rear. He spoke civilly, and treated me as a gentleman. I felt the favour he did me in consenting to cut my throat. My good master was no less affected by such urbanity. Having shaken himself sufficiently, he said:

'Jacques Tournebroche, my son, we cannot refuse such a gracious invitation.'

Two lackeys had already descended with torches. They led us to a room where a cold collation was spread on a table lighted by two silver candelabra. Monsieur d'Anquetil begged us to be seated, and my good master tied his napkin round his neck. He had already impaled a lark on the end of his fork when the sound of sobbing smote upon our ears.

'Take no notice of those cries,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'They come from Catherine, whom I have shut up in her room.'

'Ah, monsieur, you must forgive her,' said my good master, gazing sadly at the little bird on the end of his fork. 'The most succulent dishes taste bitter when seasoned with tears and cries. How have you the heart to let a woman cry? Be indulgent to this one, I implore you. Is she, then, so guilty for having blown a kiss to my young pupil, who was her neighbour and her companion in the simple time of their youth, when the charms of this pretty girl were known only in the arbour of the 'Petit Bacchus'? There is nothing therein but what is innocent, if it so be that any human action, and more particularly the action of a woman, can ever be entirely

innocent and free from original sin. Allow me also to tell you, monsieur, that jealousy is an antiquated sentiment, a melancholy remnant of barbarous customs, which should find no place in an elegant and well-bred mind.'

'Monsieur l'Abbé,' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'from what do you conclude that I am jealous? I am not. But I will not allow a woman to make a fool of me.'

'We are the plaything of the winds,' said my good master with a sigh. 'Everything laughs at us, sky, stars, rain, breezes, light and shade, and woman herself. Allow Catherine to sup with us, monsieur. She is pretty, she will enliven your table. All that she may have done, that kiss and what more, makes her no less pleasing to look upon. Woman's infidelities do not mar her face. Nature, who delights in decking them, is indifferent to their faults. Imitate her, monsieur, and forgive Catherine.'

I joined my prayers to those of my good master, and Monsieur d'Anquetil consented to liberate the prisoner. He went to the door whence the cries came, opened it, and called Catherine, who replied merely by renewed lamentations.

'Messieurs,' her lover told us, 'she is there, lying flat on her chest on her bed, her head buried in the pillow, and making ridiculous contortions at every sob. Look at her! There is the sort of thing for which we make ourselves so unhappy and commit so many follies! Catherine, come to supper!'

But Catherine did not budge, and continued crying. He went and took her by the arm, by the waist. She resisted. He became urgent:

'Come then, come, my darling!'

She stayed obstinately where she was, holding on to the bed and the mattress.

Her lover lost patience at last, and cried in a rough voice, with many oaths:

'Get up, you wench.'

She immediately got up and, smiling amid her tears, took his arm and came into the dining-room, a not unhappy victim.

She sat down between Monsieur d'Anquetil and me, her

head on her lover's shoulder, and seeking my foot with hers under the table.

'Messieurs,' said our host, 'I trust you will forgive an impetuous action I cannot regret since it gives me the honour of entertaining you here. I really cannot put up with all the caprices of this charming young woman, and I have become very suspicious since I surprised her with her Capuchin.'

'My friend,' said Catherine, pressing my foot with hers, 'your jealousy is at fault. Know then, that I have no fancy for any one but for Monsieur Jacques.'

'She is joking,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil.

'Have no doubt about that,' I replied. 'One can see she loves but you.'

'Without vanity,' he answered, 'I think I have inspired her with some interest. But she is a coquette.'

'A drink!' said Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard.

Monsieur d'Anquetil passed the demijohn to my good master, and exclaimed as he did so:

'Well, Abbé, as you belong to the Church you can perhaps tell us why women love monks.'

Monsieur Coignard wiped his lips and said:

'The reason is that monks love with humility, and lend themselves to anything. Another reason is that their natural instincts have not been weakened by taking thought or by having any care for their manners. This is a generous wine, monsieur.'

'You do me too much honour,' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'The wine is Monsieur de la Guéritaude's. I took his mistress from him, I may well take his bottles.'

'Nothing could be fairer,' replied my good master. 'I see, monsieur, that you are not a man to stand on convention.'

'Do not praise me more than is fitting, Abbé,' answered Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'My birth renders easy to me what would be difficult for the vulgar. A common man is forced to put restraint on all his actions. He is the slave of a strict uprightness, but a gentleman has the honour to fight for his king and for his own pleasure. That dispenses him from troubling himself about silly trifles.

I have served under Monsieur de Villars,[1] I fought in the War of Succession and risked being killed for no reason at the battle of Parma. Surely it is a small matter that in return I should have the right to beat my men, defraud my creditors, and, should it please me, steal my neighbour's wife or his mistress.'

'You speak like a nobleman,' said my good master, 'and you are jealous to uphold the prerogatives of nobility.'

'I have none of those scruples,' continued Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'which intimidate the mass of mankind and which I hold useful merely to stay the fearful and to restrain the discontented.'

'Well and good,' said my excellent master.

'I do not believe in virtue,' said the other.

'You are right,' said my good master. 'Seeing the way in which the human animal is made, he could not be virtuous without some deformity. Look at this pretty girl, for instance, who is supping with us; her little head, her beautiful throat, her charmingly rounded form, and all the rest. In what corner of her person could a grain of virtue find lodgment? There is no room, all is so firm, so full of sap, plump, and well filled. Virtue, like the raven, lives among the ruins. It is to be found in the lines and wrinkles of the body. I myself, monsieur, who since my childhood have pondered the austere maxims of religion and philosophy, I have been unable to insinuate any virtue in myself save by the breaches made by suffering and age in my constitution. And yet, each time, I have been filled less with virtue than with pride. So I am in the habit of praying to the Creator of the world in this wise: "My God, keep me from virtue, if it remove me from holiness." Ah, holiness! that is what it is possible and needful to attain to! There is the goal that befits us! May we reach it one day! In the meanwhile, give me something to drink.'

'I will confide to you that I do not believe in God,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil.

'For once, I think you are to blame, monsieur,' said the

[1] Marshal of France, commanded at Malplaquet, 1653–1734.

Abbé. 'One must believe in God and in all the truths of our holy religion.'

Monsieur d'Anquetil cried out:

'You are laughing at us, Abbé, and you take us to be far more foolish than we are. I tell you I neither believe in God nor devil, and I never go to mass unless to the king's mass. Priestly discourses are but old wives' tales, only endurable, if then, in the days when my grandmother saw the Abbé de Choisy, dressed as a woman, distributing the blessed bread in the church of Jacques-du-Haut-Pas. There may have been such a thing as religion in those days. There is none now, thank God!'

'In the name of all the saints and devils do not speak thus, my friend,' exclaimed Catherine. 'God exists, as certainly as this pie is on the table, and the proof is that one day last year, finding myself in great poverty and distress, on Brother Ange's advice, I burnt a candle in the church of the Capuchins, and on the morrow I met Monsieur de la Guéritaude out walking, who gave me this house with all its furniture and the cellar full of wine that we are now drinking, and enough money to live honestly.'

'Fie! Fie!' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'the foolish wench drags God into her wretched affairs! It is so shocking that it offends one even though one be an atheist.'

'Monsieur,' said my good master, 'it is infinitely better to drag God into one's wretched affairs, as does this simple-minded girl, than after your fashion to turn Him out of the world He has created. If He did not directly send that fat money-dealer to Catherine, He at least allowed her to meet him. We are ignorant of His ways, and what this innocent being says contains more truth, notwithstanding some admixture and alloy of blasphemy, than all the vain speeches spouted by the impious from an empty heart. There is nothing more detestable than this libertinage of mind displayed by the youth of to-day. Your words make one shudder. Shall I answer them with proofs drawn from holy books and the writings of the Fathers? Shall I make you listen to the Almighty as He spoke to the patriarchs and the prophets: "Sicut locutus est

Abraham et semini ejus in saecula"? Shall I unroll the traditions of the Church before your eyes? Shall I invoke the authority of the two Testaments against you? Shall I overwhelm you with the miracles of Christ and His word as miraculous as His acts? No. I will not take up these holy weapons. I fear too greatly to profane them in this combat, which is not serious. The Church warns us, in her prudence, that edification should not be made an occasion for scandal, therefore I shall remain silent, monsieur, on the subject of the truths on which I was fed at the foot of the altar. But, without doing violence to the pure modesty of my soul and without exposing the sacred mysteries to profanation, I will show to you the Almighty ruling over the reason of mankind; I will show you Him in pagan philosophy and even the speeches of the impious. Yes, monsieur, I will make you recognize that you profess Him in spite of yourself even while you pretend that He does not exist. For you will grant that if there is an ordering of things in this world it is a divine ordering, and flows from the source and fountain of all order.'

'I grant you that,' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil, lying back in his arm-chair and stroking his leg, which was well turned.

'Mind what you say, then,' continued my good master. 'Even while you say that God does not exist, what are you doing but stringing thoughts together, marshalling your reasons, and manifesting in yourself the primary cause of all thought and all reason, which is God? And can one even attempt to establish the fact that He does not exist without making conspicuous by this worst of all arguments, which is nevertheless an argument, some remnant of the harmony that He has established in the universe?'

'Abbé,' replied M. d'Anquetil, 'you are an amiable sophist. One knows nowadays that the world is but the work of blind chance, and we must no longer speak of Providence since the physicists have seen winged frogs in the moon by the aid of their glasses.'

'Well, monsieur,' answered my good master, 'I am in no wise troubled that there should be winged frogs in the

moon; such marsh fowl are suitable inhabitants for a world which has not been sanctified by the blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. I confess we know but a small part of the universe, and it may be, as Monsieur d'Astarac says, who, by the by, is quite mad, that this world is but a spot of mud in an infinity of worlds. It may be that Copernicus, the astrologer, was not altogether dreaming when he announced that the earth is not the mathematical centre of the universe. I have read that an Italian, called Galileo, who perished miserably, also thought as did Copernicus, and to-day we see little Monsieur de Fontenelle[1] in accordance with this way of thinking. But these are but vain imaginings, fitted merely to disturb weak minds. What matters it that the physical world should be larger or smaller, of one shape or another? It suffices that it has but to be envisaged through the light of intelligence and reason for God to appear manifest in it.

'If the meditations of a sage can be of any use to you, monsieur, I will teach you how this proof of God's existence, better than the proof that St Anselm gives us, and quite independent of those proofs which come from Revelation, appeared to me suddenly in all its clearness. It was at Séez, twenty-five years ago. I was librarian to the bishop, and the corridor windows overlooked a yard where I saw a kitchen-maid scouring Monsignor's pots and pans every morning. She was tall, young, and strong. A light down shaded her upper lip, and lent a provocation and a charm to her face. Her tangled hair, her thin bust, and long bare arms were as suitable to Adonis as to Diana, in fact she was a boyish beauty. I loved her for it. I loved her strong red hands. In a word, this girl filled me with a desire as strong and savage as herself. You know how overmastering such feelings are. I made mine known to her from my window with few words and signs. She let me understand more briefly still that she responded to my sentiments and gave me a rendezvous for the following night in the loft, where she slept on the hay by the kindness of Monsignor whose dishes she washed.

[1] Nephew of Corneille, secretary of the Academy of Sciences, 1657–1757. Author of *Entretiens sur la pluralité des mondes.*

I awaited the coming of night with impatience. When at length it enfolded the earth I took a ladder and climbed up to the loft where the girl awaited me. My first thought was to embrace her, the second, to admire the chain of events which had led me to her arms. For after all, monsieur, a young divine, a kitchen-maid, a ladder, a bundle of hay! what a sequence, what an ordering of things! what a just meeting of pre-established harmonies, what a linking of cause and effect! what a proof of the existence of God! That is what struck me so strangely, and I rejoice at being able to add this profane demonstration to the reasons supplied by theology and which are, moreover, amply sufficient.'

'Abbé,' said Catherine, 'the worst part of your story is that the girl had no bosom. A woman with no bosom is like a bed without a pillow. But d'Anquetil, don't you know what we might do now?'

'Yes,' he said, 'play at ombre, which requires three people.'

'If you want to,' she continued. 'But I pray you, my friend, call for pipes. Nothing is pleasanter than to smoke a pipe of tobacco while drinking wine.'

A lackey brought some cards and the pipes, which we lighted. The room was soon filled with a thick smoke, amidst which our host and Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard played solemnly at piquet.

Luck favoured my good master till the moment when Monsieur d'Anquetil thought he saw him for the third time marking fifty-five when he had but forty, and called him a Greek, a card-sharper, and a knight of the road, and threw a bottle at his head, which broke on the table and deluged it with wine.

'You will have to give yourself the trouble of opening another bottle,' said the Abbé, 'for we are very thirsty.'

'Willingly,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'but you must know, Abbé, that a gentleman does not mark points that he has not made, and does not force cards except at the king's table, where all sorts of people are met to whom one is under no obligation. Everywhere else it is villainous. Do you want to be taken for an adventurer then, Abbé?'

'It is a remarkable thing,' said my good master, 'that at cards or dice people blame a practice recommended in the arts of war, in politics, and in business, where one prides oneself on correcting a turn of ill-fortune. It is not that I do not pride myself on my honesty at cards. I am exact in my dealings, thank God, and you were dreaming, monsieur, just now when you thought you saw me mark points that I had not scored. Were it otherwise, I should invoke the example of the Bishop of Geneva, of blessed memory, who made no scruples about cheating at cards. But I cannot help reflecting that men are more punctilious at cards than in serious matters, and that they bring more honesty to bear on trick-track, where it is a passable hindrance, and leave it out in battles or in treaties of peace where it would be troublesome. Aelian,[1] monsieur, has written a book in Greek on the subject of stratagem, showing to what excess ruse may be carried by great leaders.'

'Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'I have not read your Aelian, and shall not read him as long as I live, but I have been to the wars as every good gentleman has. I served the king for eighteen months. It is the noblest of callings. I will tell you exactly wherein it consists. It is a secret I may well confide to you since there is no one to hear me but you, some bottles, monsieur, whom I am going to kill presently, and this girl here who is taking off her clothes.'

'Yes,' Catherine said, 'my chemise is enough, I 'm so hot.'

'Well, then,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'war, whatever the gazettes may say, simply consists in stealing chickens and pigs from the peasants. When soldiers are on campaign that is all they think about.'

'You are quite right,' said my good master, 'and in the old days in Gaul they used to say that the soldier's doxy was Madame Lightfinger. But I would beg of you not to kill my pupil, Jacques Tournebroche.'

'Abbé,' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'I 'm obliged in honour to do so.'

[1]Greek writer on military tactics, third century.

'Ouf!' said Catherine, arranging the lace of her chemise at her throat, 'now I feel better.'

'Monsieur,' continued my good master, 'Jacques Tournebroche is of great help to me in a translation of Zozimus the Panopolitan that I have undertaken. I should be infinitely obliged to you if you would not fight with him until after this great work is achieved.'

'I do not care a fig for your Zozimus,' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'I don't care a fig. You hear me, Abbé? I care no more than did the king for his first mistress,' and he began to sing:

'To shape the youthful squire of horse,
Steady in stirrup and set on his course,
The wits of woman must help him there—
Laire, lan, laire.

'Who is this Zozimus?'

'Zozimus, monsieur,' replied the Abbé, 'Zozimus of Panopolis, was a learned Greek who flourished in Alexandria in the third century of the Christian era, and wrote treatises on the spagyric art.'

'How do you think that affects me?' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'and why do you translate him?

Strike the iron while 'tis hot,
Quoth she, nor let her be forgot
Whose title was the Sultan's fair—
Laire, lan, laire.'

'Monsieur,' said my good master, 'I grant you that there is no real use in doing so, and that it will not affect the course of the world. But in illustrating, with notes and commentaries, this treatise, which the Greek composed for his sister Theosebia——'

Catherine interrupted my good master's discourse by singing in a shrill voice:

'In spite of jealousy and rebuke
I 'd see my husband made a duke,
I 'm sick of the sight of his desk and chair—
Laire, lan, laire.'

'I contribute,' went on my good master, 'to the treasures of knowledge amassed by learned men, and I add my stone to the monument of true history, which is rather that of

maxims and opinions than of wars and treaties; for, monsieur, the nobility of man——'

Catherine resumed:

'I can hear the public murmuring,
I know the sort of ballad they 'll sing,
The vulgar herd—but it's my affair—
Laire, lan, laire.'

Notwithstanding her, my good master continued:

'—lies in this thought, and having regard to that it is not a matter of indifference to ascertain what idea of the nature of metals and of the qualities of matter this Egyptian had formed.'

Monsieur l'Abbé Jérôme Coignard drank a great draught of wine while Catherine took up her song:

'Pleasant to win the style of lord
Whether or no by naked sword,
If the end be fair, the means are fair—
Laire, lan, laire.'

'Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'you drink nothing—what is more, you talk wild nonsense. In Italy, during the War of Succession, I was under the orders of a brigadier who translated Polybius. But he was an idiot. Why translate Zozimus?'

'If you want to know all,' said my good master, 'I find therein a certain sensuality.'

'Well and good,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'but how can Monsieur Tournebroche help you, who at this moment is caressing my mistress?'

'By the knowledge of Greek,' said my good master, 'which I have imparted to him.'

Monsieur d'Anquetil then turned to me and said:

'What, monsieur, you know Greek! Then you are not a gentleman?'

'Monsieur,' I replied, 'my father is the banner bearer to the Guild of Parisian Cooks.'

'That makes it impossible for me to kill you, monsieur. I beg you to excuse me. But, Abbé, you are drinking nothing. You have deceived me. I thought you were a good toper, and I wished you to be my chaplain when I should have a house of my own.'

In the mean time, Monsieur Coignard was drinking out of the bottle and Catherine leant towards me and whispered in my ear:

'Jacques, I feel that I shall never love any one but you.'

These words, coming from a pretty person in her chemise, troubled me extremely, but Catherine put the finishing touch to my intoxication by making me drink out of her glass, which passed unnoticed in the confusion of a supper which had mounted to all our heads.

Monsieur d'Anquetil, breaking the neck of a bottle against the table, filled us fresh bumpers, and from that moment on I could not give an account of what was said and done around me. All the same, I saw that Catherine had traitorously poured a glass of wine down her lover's back between the neck and the coat collar. Monsieur d'Anquetil replied by pouring two or three bottles over the young lady in the chemise, whom he thus turned into a sort of mythological figure, of the damp family of nymphs and naiads. She cried with rage and twisted herself about convulsively.

At the same moment we heard heavy raps from the door-knocker in the silence of the night, whereupon we all became suddenly still and dumb, like enchanted guests.

The knocks soon redoubled in strength and frequency, and Monsieur d'Anquetil broke the silence first by asking out loud, with dreadful oaths, who this troublesome person might be. My good master, who in the most ordinary occurrences was often inspired with admirable maxims, rose up, and said with unction and solemnity:

'What matters whose the hand that knocks so roughly against the closed door for a vulgar and possibly ridiculous motive! Let us not ask, and let us take these blows as struck at the door of our hardened and corrupted souls. Let us say at each resounding blow: That is to warn us to amend our ways and think of our salvation, which we neglect in the pursuit of pleasure; that is to make us disdain the good things of this world; that is to make us think of eternity. Thus, we shall obtain all possible profit from an occurrence otherwise slight and of but small account.'

'You are amusing, Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'With the vigour with which they knock they will burst in the door.'

And, indeed, the knocker rattled like thunder.

'They are brigands,' cried the wine-sopped Catherine. 'Jesus! we shall be massacred! it is our punishment for having turned out the little brother. I have told you a hundred times, Anquetil, ill luck comes to the house whence they drive a monk.'

'Stupid!' replied d'Anquetil. 'This cursed friar makes her believe all the silliness he wishes. Thieves would be more polite, or at least more discreet. It is more likely the watch.'

'The watch! But that is worse still,' said Catherine.

'Bah!' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'we will thrash them.'

My good master put a bottle in one pocket just for precaution and another bottle in the other pocket for equilibrium, as the story says. The whole house shook under the furious blows of the knocker. Monsieur d'Anquetil, whose soldierly qualities were awakened by this attack, cried out:

'I will go and reconnoitre the enemy.'

Stumbling as he went he ran to the window where he had so lately and so liberally boxed his mistress's ears, and then came back into the dining-room bursting with laughter.

'Ha, ha!' he cried, 'do you know who is knocking? It is Monsieur de la Guéritaude in a claw-hammer wig, with two big lackeys bearing lighted torches.'

'Impossible!' said Catherine. 'At this time he is sleeping by the side of his elderly wife.'

'Then it is his very ghost,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'and we must believe that the ghost has taken the revenue officer's wig. Even a spectre could not imitate it so well, for it is so absolutely comic!'

'Do you really mean it, and are not joking?' said Catherine. 'Is it really Monsieur de la Guéritaude?'

'It is he himself, Catherine, if I am to believe my eyes.'

'Then I am lost,' exclaimed the poor girl. 'How unlucky women are! They never can leave us in peace.

What will become of me? Messieurs, will you not hide yourselves in different cupboards?'

'That might be done,' said Abbé Coignard, 'but how are we to take with us three bottles, empty and for the most part broken, or at any rate with their necks knocked off, the debris of the demijohn, which monsieur flung at my head, the cloth, the pasty, the plates, the candelabra, and the chemise of mademoiselle here, which, owing to the wine with which it is soaked, has become but a pink and transparent veil for her beauty?'

'It is true that idiot has wet my chemise,' said Catherine, 'and I shall catch cold. But it would perhaps suffice were we to hide Monsieur d'Anquetil in the upper room. I will pass off the Abbé as my uncle and Monsieur Jacques as my brother.'

'Not so,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'I myself will beg Monsieur de la Guéritaude to sup with us.'

We implored him—my good master, Catherine, and myself—to do nothing of the kind; we besought him, we hung on his neck. All in vain. He seized a light and went down the steps. We followed him trembling. He opened the door. Monsieur de la Guéritaude stood there, as he had described him to us, in his wig, between two lackeys armed with torches. Monsieur d'Anquetil bowed ceremoniously to him and said:

'Do us the favour to come inside, monsieur. You will meet some charming and uncommon people. A turnspit to whom Mademoiselle Catherine blows kisses from her window, and an Abbé who believes in God.'

And he bowed low.

Monsieur de la Guéritaude was a tall, withered man, little inclined to this kind of pleasantry. It irritated him exceedingly, and his anger was visibly increased by the sight of my good master, unbuttoned, a bottle in his hand and two others in his pockets, and by the appearance of Catherine in her damp and clinging chemise.

'Young man,' said he to Monsieur d'Anquetil, coldly angry, 'I have the honour to know your esteemed father, with whom I shall to-morrow consider to what town the king should send you to meditate on your disgraceful

behaviour and your impertinence. The worthy gentleman, to whom I have lent money which I do not press for, can refuse me nothing. And our well-beloved prince, who is in exactly the same position as your father, is inclined to do me favour. So that is settled. I have put through more difficult things in my time, thank God! As to this young woman, since it is hopeless to expect better ways of her, before midday to-morrow I shall speak two words to the head of the police, who, I know, is full willing to send her to the reformatory. I have no more to say to you. This house is mine. I have paid for it, and I mean to enter it.'

Then turning towards his lackeys, and designating my good master and me with the point of his stick, he said:

'Throw those two drunkards out.'

Monsieur Jérôme Coignard was commonly of exemplary sweetness, and he was in the habit of saying that he owed this gentleness to the vicissitudes of his life, fortune having treated him like the pebbles that the sea polishes by rolling them in its ebb and flow. He bore insults calmly, as much through a Christian spirit as through philosophy. But what helped him most was his great contempt for mankind, from which he did not except himself. Nevertheless, this time, he was angry out of all proportion, and entirely forgot his prudence.

'Hold your tongue, vile money-grubber!' he cried, waving his bottle like a club. 'If these rogues dare come near me, I will break their heads, to teach them to respect my cloth, which bears sufficient witness to my sacred character.'

In the torch-light, shining with perspiration, rubicund, his eyes starting from his head, his coat open, and his great paunch half out of his breeches, my good master seemed the sort of fellow who would not easily be driven into a corner. The rogues hesitated.

'Drag him out!' cried Monsieur de la Guéritaude to them. 'Drag out this wine-skin! Do you not see you have only to push him into the gutter, and he 'll stay there until the sweepers come to throw him on the dust-heap? I would drag him out myself, were I not afraid to soil my clothes.'

My good master fiercely resented these insults.

'Odious tax-gatherer!' he said, in a voice fit to echo in a church. 'Infamous hanger-on; savage sweater of the people! You pretend that this house is yours? If you want people to believe you, if you want them to know it is yours, write up over the door this word from the gospel: *Aceldama*, which means 'price of blood.' Then, bowing low, we will allow the master to enter his dwelling. Thief, bandit, homicide, write with the charcoal I will throw in your face, write with your dirty hand over the door your owner's title: Price of the blood of the widow and the orphan, price of the blood of the just, *Aceldama*. If not, stay outside and leave us within, usurer.'

Monsieur de la Guéritaude, who had never heard anything like this in his life, thought he had to do with a madman, as he might well believe, and, rather to protect himself than to make an attack, he raised his big stick. My good master, beside himself, flung his bottle at the revenue officer's head, who fell full length on the pavement, crying out: 'He has killed me!' And as he was swimming in the wine out of the bottle it looked as if he had been assassinated. His two lackeys tried to fling themselves on the murderer, and one of them, a stout fellow, thought he had him, when Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard gave him such a blow in the stomach with his head that the fool rolled in the gutter beside the financier.

He got up for his sins, and, arming himself with a lighted torch, threw it down the passage whence his enemy had fallen on him. My good master was no longer there, he had already fled the spot. Monsieur d'Anquetil was there still with Catherine, and he it was who received the lighted torch in his face. This insult seemed unbearable to him; he drew his sword and plunged it into the body of the unlucky rogue, who thus learnt to his cost that it does not do to attack a gentleman. Nevertheless, my good master had not made twenty paces down the road before the second lackey, a long, spidery-legged beggar, commenced running after him, calling to the watch, and crying: 'Stop him.' He gained on him, and at the corner of the rue Saint-Guillaume we saw him stretch out his arm

to seize him by the collar. But my good master, who knew more than a trick or two, doubled sharply, and passing by his man tripped him up against a post, where he cracked his head. This occurred whilst we were running, Monsieur d'Anquetil and I, to the assistance of Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, whom it was not seemly to desert in this pressing danger.

'Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'give me your hand, you are a brave man.'

'In truth, I think I was more or less murderous,' said my good master. 'But I am not unnatural enough to glory in it. It suffices me if I do not incur too much blame. These violent ways are scarcely mine, and such as you see me, monsieur, I am better fitted to teach the liberal arts from a college chair than to fight with lackeys on the roadside.'

'Oh,' continued Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'that is not the worst part of the business. I think you have nearly killed a farmer-general.'

'Is that really so?' asked Monsieur l'Abbé.

'As true as I stuck my sword through the tripes of some of his dirty crew.'

'At this juncture,' said the Abbé, 'it is first necessary to ask forgiveness of God, towards whom alone we are answerable for spilt blood; secondly, to hasten our steps to the nearest fountain, so as to wash ourselves. For I think I am bleeding from the nose.'

'You are right, Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'for the fool who lies cut open in the gutter has broken my head. What impertinence!'

'Forgive him,' said the Abbé, 'so that you may be forgiven for what you have done unto him.'

We found at the right moment, in the wall of a hospital where the rue du Bac loses itself in the fields, a little bronze Triton throwing a spray of water into a stone basin. We stopped to wash ourselves and drink, for our throats were dry.

'What have we done,' said my good master, 'and how comes it I have been so unlike my real pacific self? It is indeed true one must not judge men from their actions,

which depend on circumstances, but rather as God our Father does, by their secret thoughts and inward intentions.'

'And Catherine,' I asked, 'what has become of her in this terrible adventure?'

'I left her,' replied Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'blowing into her financier's mouth to put life into him. But she might spare her pains. I know La Guéritaude. He is pitiless. He will send her to the reformatory and perchance to America. I am sorry for her. She was a pretty girl. I did not love her. But she was mad about me. And, extraordinary to relate, here am I without a mistress.'

'Do not be troubled,' said my good master, 'you will find another no different from that one, or at least not essentially different. And it seems to me that what you look for in a woman is common to all.'

'It is quite clear that we are in danger,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'I of being put in the Bastille, and you, Abbé, of being hanged with your pupil, Tournebroche, who nevertheless has killed no one.'

'It is only too true,' replied my good master. 'We must think of our safety. It may be necessary to quit Paris, where they will not fail to look for us, and even to fly to Holland. Alas, I foresee that I shall write scurrilous papers for women of the theatre, with this very hand which illustrated with such ample notes the alchemistic treatises of Zozimus the Panopolitan.'

'Listen to me, Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'I have a friend who will hide us on his estate as long as may be necessary. He lives four leagues from Lyons, in a wild and horrid part of the country where there is nothing to be seen but poplars, grass, and woods. That 's where we must go, and wait till the storm has passed over. We will turn our attention to the chase. But we must find a post-chaise as quickly as possible, or better still, a berlin.'

'I know the very thing, monsieur,' said the Abbé. 'The Hôtel du Cheval-Rouge, at the cross-roads of Les Bergères, will supply you with good horses and every kind of carriage. I knew the landlord in the days when I was secretary to Madame de Saint-Ernest. He was willing to oblige people of quality; I believe he is dead since, but

he ought to have a son who takes after him. Have you any money?'

'I have a fairly large sum on me,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'and very glad I am for it, for I cannot think of going back to my house, where the police will not fail to search for me to take me to the Châtelet.[1] I have forgotten my men, left in Catherine's house, and God knows what has become of them; but I care little. I beat them and I never paid them, and yet I am not sure of their fidelity. On whom can one rely? Let us go to the cross-roads of Les Bergères at once.'

'Monsieur,' said the Abbé, 'I am going to make you a proposition, hoping that it may prove agreeable to you. Tournebroche and I are living in an alchemist's workshop, in a tumbledown old château at the Cross of Les Sablons, where you can easily spend twelve hours without being seen. We will take you with us there, and we will wait until our carriage is ready. There is this much advantage that Les Sablons is not far from the cross-roads of Bergères.'

Monsieur d'Anquetil did not gainsay these arrangements, and we decided—standing before the little Triton blowing water from his full cheeks—to go first to the Cross of Les Sablons and then to take a berlin at the Hôtel du Cheval-Rouge to drive us to Lyons.

'I will confide to you, monsieur,' said my good master, 'that of the three bottles I took care to carry off with me one was unluckily broken on the head of Monsieur de la Guéritaude, the second smashed in my pocket during my flight. They are both much to be regretted. The third was preserved intact against all hope—and here it is!'

And drawing it from under his coat he placed it on the edge of the fountain.

'That is one good thing,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'you have wine, I have dice and cards in my pockets. We can play.'

'It is indeed excellent entertainment,' said my good master. 'A game of cards, monsieur, is a book of adventures of the kind we call romance, and it has this superiority

[1] Fortress in old Paris. Seat of criminal jurisdiction.

over other books of its kind that one composes it even while one reads it, and one need not have wit to compose it, nor know one's letters to read it. And it is, furthermore, a marvellous work, in that it makes sense and has a new meaning each time that one turns over the leaves. It is of such cunning design that one cannot admire it sufficiently, for, from mathematical laws, it draws thousands and thousands of curious combinations and so many singular juxtapositions that people have been led to think, contrary to truth, that they could discover therein the secrets of the heart, the mystery of fate, and the hidden things of the future. What I say is particularly applicable to the tarot of the Bohemians, which is the best of card games, but also may apply to the game of piquet. The invention of cards may be attributed to the ancients and, for my part, although, truth to tell, I know no text which positively supports me here, I believe them to be of Chaldean origin. But in its present form the game of piquet does not go farther back than the time of Charles VII, if it is true, as is said in a learned dissertation which I remember to have read at Séez, that the queen of hearts represents in an emblematical manner the beautiful Agnes Sorel, and that the queen of spades is no other, under the name of Pallas, than Jeanne Dulys, also called Jeanne Darc, who by her bravery re-established the affairs of the monarchy, and was then boiled at Rouen by the English, in a cauldron they show one for a farthing, and which I have seen in passing through that town. Certain historians maintain that this maiden was burnt alive at the stake. One reads, in Nicole Gilles [1] and in Pasquier,[2] that St Catherine and St Margaret appeared to her. But certainly it was not God who sent them, for there is no one, however little learned or pious, but knows that Margaret and Catherine were invented by the Byzantine monks, whose extravagant and barbarous imaginings have defiled the martyrology. There is a ridiculous impiety in pretending that God made saints who never existed

[1] French chronicler, d. 1503.

[2] Author of *Recherches de la France*, an inquiry into the origins of French history, 1529–1615.

appear to Jeanne Dulys, but the old chroniclers were not afraid of giving us to understand this. Why did they not say that God sent to this maiden Yseult the fair, Melusina, Bertha Big-Foot, and all the heroines of the romances of chivalry, whose existence is no more fabulous than that of the Virgin Catherine and the Virgin Margaret?

'Monsieur de Valois, in the last century, rightly set himself against these gross fables, which are as much opposed to religion as error is contrary to truth. It is to be wished that some religious, instructed in history, should make the distinction between the real saints, whom it is fitting to venerate, and saints such as Margaret, Luce or Lucy, St Eustace, who are imaginary, and even St George, of whom I have my doubts.

'If one day I am able to retire to a fair abbey, provided with a rich library, I will consecrate to this task the remainder of a life nearly worn out by tempests and shipwrecks. I long for port and desire to taste the sweets of repose befitting my age and condition.'

While Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard was making these memorable remarks, Monsieur d'Anquetil, without hearing him, seated on the edge of the basin, shuffled the cards and swore like a fiend because one could not see to play a game of piquet.

'You are right, monsieur,' said my good master, 'one cannot see very well, and I feel some annoyance, less by thought of the cards, which I can very easily do without, than for the wish I have to read some pages of the *Consolations* of Boëthius, a copy of which, in a small edition, I always carry in my coat pocket, that I may have it under my hand and open it directly I fall into misfortune, as happens to me to-day. For it is a cruel mischance, monsieur, for a man of my kind to be a homicide and menaced with the ecclesiastical prison. I feel that one single page of this admirable book would keep up my heart, which sinks at the very notion of the police.'

Pronouncing these words, he let himself sink over the inner side of the basin and so deeply that he dipped the greater part of his person into the water. But he was not concerned, and seemed not even to perceive it, and drawing

from his pocket his Boëthius, which was really there, and donning his spectacles, which had but one glass left and that broken in three places, he set himself to look in the little book for the page most appropriate to his situation. He would have found it, no doubt, and would have drawn fresh strength from it, if the ill condition of his spectacles, the tears that rose to his eyes, and the feeble light that fell from the sky had allowed the search. But he had soon to confess that he saw nothing, and he fell out with the moon who showed her sharp horn from the edge of a cloud. He addressed her with vivacity and overwhelmed her with invectives.

'Thou obscene star, mischievous and libidinous!' he said. 'Thou never weariest of holding the candle to the wicked ways of men, and thou grudgest a ray of light to him who seeks a virtuous maxim!'

'Well, well, Abbé,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'since this trollop of a moon gives us enough light to guide us through the street and not enough to play piquet, let us go straight to the château you spoke of and where I must enter without being seen.'

The advice was good, and having drained the bottle we all three took the road to the Cross of Les Sablons. Monsieur d'Anquetil and I walked on ahead, my good master, hindered by all the water his breeches had absorbed, followed us weeping, groaning, and dripping.

XVII

Our eyes were smarting in the early dawn when we reached the green door opening into the park of Les Sablons. We were under no necessity of knocking. For some time past the master of the house had given us the keys of his domain. We had planned that my good master should go forward cautiously with d'Anquetil in the shadow of the avenue, and that I should remain behind a little to look out if necessary for the faithful Crito, and for any of the kitchen varlets who might catch sight of the in-

truder. This arrangement, which was only reasonable, was to cost me much anxiety. For, at the moment when my two companions had already climbed the stairs and gained without being seen my own room, where we had decided to hide Monsieur d'Anquetil till the time for our flight in the post-chaise, I had scarcely reached the second floor, where I came upon Monsieur d'Astarac himself, clad in a robe of red damask, and bearing a silver candlestick. He put his hand on my shoulder as his habit was, and said to me:

'Well, my son, are you not well content to have broken off all dealings with women, and so escaped all the dangers of bad company? You have no need to fear from these daughters of the air those quarrels and brawls and violent and harmful scenes which commonly break out among creatures who lead an evil life. In your solitude, which the fairies make charming to you, you enjoy a delicious tranquillity.'

At first I thought he spoke mockingly. But I soon recognized that he had no such intention.

'Our meeting is very opportune, my son, and I should be much obliged to you if you would come to my workshop for a few moments.'

I followed him. With a key at least an ell in length, he opened the door of that cursed room whence I had formerly seen the infernal glow dart forth. And when we had both entered the laboratory he asked me to make up the fire, which was dying out. I threw some logs of wood in the stove, where something was cooking which gave forth a suffocating smell. While he shifted crucibles and retorts and compounded his unholy messes, I sat back on the bench where I had sunk down, and in spite of myself closed my eyes. He forced me to open them again to admire a vessel of green pottery capped with a glass top, which he held in his hand.

'My son,' he said, 'you must know that this sublimatory apparatus is called an aludel. It holds a liquid which you must carefully observe, for I am about to reveal to you that this liquid is no other than the mercury of the philosophers. Do not think it is always of so dark a hue.

Before long it will become white, and in that state it transforms metals into silver. Then, owing to my skill and cunning, it will turn red, and acquire the virtue of transmuting silver into gold. It would be greatly to your profit, doubtless, if, shut up in this laboratory, you did not leave it before these sublime operations were fully carried out, which cannot take more than two or three months. But, perchance, that would be putting too great a strain on your youth, so content yourself this time in watching the preliminaries of the work, heaping plenty of wood in the stove meanwhile, if you please.'

Having thus spoken, he bent once more over his bottles and retorts. Meanwhile I meditated on the unlucky position my ill-luck and imprudence had brought me to.

'Alas,' I said to myself, throwing logs on the fire, 'at this very moment the police are seeking us, my good master and me, and we shall have, perhaps, to go to prison; we certainly shall have to leave this château, where I had, though lacking money, board and a certain position. I shall never dare to appear again before Monsieur d'Astarac, who believes that I spent the night in the noiseless delights of magic, and it were indeed better I had done so. Alas, never again shall I see Mosaïde's niece, she who in my little room so agreeably interrupted my slumbers! And no doubt she will forget me. Perhaps she will love another on whom she will bestow the same caresses as on me. The very thought of such infidelity is intolerable to me, But, seeing how the world wags, one must expect anything and everything.'

'My son,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'you do not feed the athanor sufficiently. I perceive that you are not imbued enough with the true love of fire, whose power is capable of ripening this mercury and thus forming the marvellous fruit I shall soon be allowed to pluck. More wood! Fire, my son, is the superior element; I have often told you so, and I will give you an example. On a very cold day last winter I went to call on Mosaïde in his cottage. I found him seated with his feet on a foot-warmer, and noticed that the subtle and essential particles of the fire that escaped from the stove were powerful enough to swell

and puff out the learned man's outer robe; whence I concluded that had the fire been fiercer Mosaïde would, without any doubt about it, have been raised up into the air as he is, verily, worthy to be raised, and that were it possible to enclose in some vessel a large enough quantity of these particles of fire we might thus navigate the clouds as easily as we do to-day the sea, and visit the salamanders in their ethereal abode. I shall think over that at leisure in the time to come. And I do not despair of being able to build one of those fiery vessels myself. But let us return to our work, and put some wood in the stove.'

He kept me for a considerable time longer in this glowing chamber, whence I thought to escape as quickly as I could to rejoin Jael, to whom I was anxious to impart my woes. At length he left the workshop and I thought I was at liberty. But he disappointed my hopes once again.

'The weather,' he said, 'is quite mild to-day, although somewhat cloudy. Would it not be pleasant to take a walk in the park with me before continuing your work on Zozimus the Panopolitan, which will do much honour to you and your good master if you finish as well as you have begun?'

Regretfully I followed him to the park, when he addressed me as follows:

'I am not sorry, my son, to find myself alone with you to warn you, while there is yet time, against a great danger which may one day threaten you, and I reproach myself for not having thought of warning you sooner, for what I have to tell you is of extreme importance.'

Speaking thus, he led me to the main walk which descends to the marshes of the Seine, whence one sees Rueil and Mont Valérien with its Calvary. It was his daily walk. The path was passable, notwithstanding several trunks of trees lying across it.

'It is necessary to make you understand,' he pursued, 'to what you may be exposed in betraying your salamander. I shall not question you on your dealings with this supernatural person whom I was fortunate enough to

introduce to you. As far as I can judge, you seem yourself to feel a certain repugnance to discussing her. And perhaps it is praiseworthy on your part. If salamanders have not the same ideas as have women of the court and of the town on the discretion of their lovers, it is none the less true that it is of the essence of the beauty of love to be inexpressible, and that to spread abroad a deep-seated feeling is to profane it.

'But your salamander (whose name I could easily discover were I indiscreetly curious) has, perhaps, not spoken to you of one of her strongest passions—which is jealousy. This characteristic is common to all her kind. Bear well in mind, my son—salamanders do not allow themselves to be betrayed with impunity. They wreak a terrible vengeance on the perjured. The divine Paracelsus relates an example which will doubtless suffice to inspire you with a wholesome dread. Therefore I will make it known to you.

'In a town in Germany called Staufen there was a spagyric philosopher who, like you, had dealings with a salamander. He was depraved enough to betray her ignominiously with a woman, pretty it is true, but not impossibly beautiful. One evening, as he was supping with his new mistress and some friends, the guests saw a glistening thigh of marvellous form above their heads. The salamander showed it in order that they might be sensible that she did not merit the wrong done her by her lover. Whereafter the outraged daughter of the skies struck the faithless one with apoplexy. The vulgar, which is born to be deceived, thought it a natural death, but the initiated knew by what hand the blow came. My son, it was my duty to give you this advice and this example.'

They were less useful to me than Monsieur d'Astarac thought. While listening to them I cherished other matters for alarm. My face doubtless betrayed my anxiety, for the great cabbalist, having turned his gaze on me, asked me whether I did not fear that a pledge undertaken under such severe penalties would prove trying to my youth.

'I can reassure you on that point,' he added. 'The

salamanders' jealousy is only roused if one puts them on a rival footing with women, and, truth to tell, it is more resentment, indignation, and disgust than real jealousy. Salamanders have too fine a soul and too subtle an intelligence to be envious one of another and to suffer a feeling which harks back to the barbarity in which mankind is still half immersed. On the contrary, they make a pleasure of sharing with their companions the delights they enjoy in the company of a sage, and amuse themselves by bringing the prettiest of their sisters to their lovers. You will soon experience that they actually push amiability to the point I have described, and not a year or even six months will pass before your room will be a meeting-place for five or six daughters of the light vying with one another who shall loose before you their dazzling girdles. Do not fear to respond to their caresses, my son. Your friend will take no umbrage, and how should she take offence since she is so wise? In your turn, do not be vexed should your salamander leave you for a time to visit another philosopher. Look upon this overweening jealousy which men bring to the union of the sexes as a savage feeling founded on the most absurd illusion. It rests on the idea that a woman is yours when she has given herself to you, which is simply a play upon words.'

While thus holding forth to me, Monsieur d'Astarac had entered on the mandragora path, and we already perceived Mosaïde's cottage through the foliage, when a terrible voice rang in my ears and made my heart beat violently. It rolled out raucous sounds accompanied by gnashing of teeth, and on drawing near one realized that the sounds were modulated and each phrase terminated in a sort of feeble recitative, which one could not hear without shuddering.

After taking a few steps forward we could, by straining our ears, grasp the meaning of these strange words. The voice said:

'Listen to the malediction of Elisha and his curse on the joyful and insolent children. Hark to the anathema which Barak launched at Meroz.

'I condemn thee in the name of Archithariel, also called

the lord of battles, who holds the shining sword. I devote thee to perdition in the name of Sardaliphon, who presents his master with the acceptable flowers and the garlands of merit offered by the children of Israel.

'Be accursed, O dog! and anathema, O swine!'

On looking whence the voice came we saw Mosaïde standing in his doorway, his arms raised, his hands like claws with their curved nails which the sunlight appeared to redden. Crowned with his dirty head-dress, wrapped in his gaudy robe which, opening, allowed his thin, bowed legs to appear in their ragged breeches, he looked like some mendicant soothsayer, eternal and aged. His eyes gleamed. He said:

'Be thou accursed, in the name of the Globes; be thou accursed, in the name of the Wheels; be thou accursed, in the name of the mysterious Beasts which Exekiel saw.'

And he stretched out his long, clawed arms before him, repeating:

'In the name of the Globes, in the name of the Wheels, in the name of the mysterious Beasts, go thou down among those who are no more.'

We went a few steps into the wood to see the object to which Mosaïde extended his arms and his wrath, and my surprise was great at discovering Monsieur Jérôme Coignard, hanging on a thorn-bush by his coat. The night's disorder showed all over his person; his bands and hose all torn, his stockings stained with mud, his shirt half open, all were pitiable reminders of our common misadventures, and, worst of all, his swollen nose now spoilt that fine and smiling expression which never left his face.

I rushed towards him and drew him so successfully out of the thorn-bush that he left there but a fragment of his breeches. And Mosaïde, having nothing left to curse, went back into his house. As he only wore slippers, I was enabled to see that his leg was in the middle of his foot, so that the heel was nearly half as far out behind as the instep in front. This formation rendered his walk extremely ungraceful, which might otherwise have been rather noble.

'Jacques Tournebroche, my son,' said my good master with a sigh, 'that Jew must be Isaac Laquedem [1] himself, to swear thus in all languages. He consigned me to a violent and early death with an abundance of imagery, and he called me a pig in fourteen different dialects, if I counted aright. I should take him to be Antichrist, did he not lack several of the signs by which that enemy of the Almighty is to be recognized. In any case, he is a wicked Jew, and never has the wheel been applied in sign of infamy on the garb of a wilder miscreant. As for him, he deserves not only the wheel which they formerly fastened to the Jews' cloaks, but that wheel to which they fasten evil-doers.'

And my good master, extremely irritated in his turn, shook his fist at Mosaïde's back and accused him of crucifying children and devouring the flesh of new-born babes.

Monsieur d'Astarac came up to him and touched him on the chest with the ruby he wore on his finger.

'It is useful,' said the great cabbalist, 'to know the properties of precious stones. The ruby appeases resentment and you will soon see Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard return to his usual gentleness.'

My good master was already smiling, more from the effect of a philosophy which raised this admirable man above all human passions than from the virtue of the stone. For, I must own even at the time when my recital darkens and becomes saddened, Monsieur Jérôme Coignard showed me an example of wisdom in circumstances where it is rarest of all to meet with it.

We asked him the reason of the quarrel. But I understood by the vagueness of his embarrassed replies that he had no wish to satisfy our curiosity. I had suspected from the first that Jael was mixed up in it in some manner, a plain proof of this being that we heard mingled with the grating voice of Mosaïde the grating of locks and the outburst of a quarrel in the cottage between the uncle and niece. When I did my best again to extract some enlightenment from my good master, he said:

'Hatred of Christians is deep-rooted in the heart of the

[1] The Dutch name for the Wandering Jew.

Jews, and this Mosaïde is an odious example of it. I thought I could discern in his horrid mouthings some portion of the imprecations vomited last century by the synagogue on a little Dutch Jew called Baruch or Benedict, known later under the name of Spinoza, for having formulated a philosophy which was utterly refuted almost at its birth by able theologians. But this old Mordecai added to them, it seemed to me, many imprecations more horrible still, and I confess that they touched me a little. I was just meditating escape by flight from this torrent of abuse when, to my misfortune, I was caught up in these thorns, and so well seized in different parts of my clothes and my skin that I thought I should have left both one and the other there; and I should be there still in the liveliest pain had not Tournebroche, my pupil, delivered me.

'Thorns are nothing,' said Monsieur d'Astarac. 'But I fear, Monsieur l'Abbé, that you may have stepped on a mandragora.'

'That is the least of my anxieties,' said the Abbé.

'You are wrong,' said Monsieur d'Astarac with vivacity. 'It is enough to put your foot on a mandragora to be entangled in some criminal affair and perish miserably therein.'

'Ah, monsieur,' said my good master, 'these are perils indeed, and I see that it is necessary to live close confined within the eloquent walls of the Astaracian, that queen of libraries. I quitted it for a moment and received at my head the Beasts of Ezekiel, without counting the rest.'

'Have you nothing to tell me of Zozimus the Panopolitan?' asked Monsieur d'Astarac.

'He goes on his way,' replied my good master, 'although a little languidly for the moment!'

'Bethink yourself, Monsieur l'Abbé,' said the cabbalist, 'that the possession of the greatest secrets is bound up in the knowledge of these ancient texts.'

'I bethink myself of it with the greatest solicitude,' said the Abbé.

And Monsieur d'Astarac, on receiving this assurance, strode off under the trees at the call of the salamanders,

leaving us by the faun who fingered his flute, careless of his head fallen on the grass beneath him.

My good master took my arm with the air of one who can at length talk openly.

'Jacques Tournebroche, my son,' he said, 'I must not conceal from you that a somewhat strange meeting took place this morning under the roof of the château, while you were detained on the first floor by that mad fire-blower. For I overheard him distinctly asking you to help him with his cooking, which is far less odorous and Christian than that of Maître Léonard, your father. Alas, when shall I see again the cook-shop of the 'Reine Pédauque,' and Monsieur Blaizot's bookshop, at the sign of St Catherine, where I took such pleasure in turning over the pages of the new books from Amsterdam and The Hague!'

'Alas,' I exclaimed, with tears in my eyes, 'when shall I myself see them again? When shall I see once more the rue Saint-Jacques where I was born, and my dear parents, to whom the news of our misfortunes will cause the most acute grief. But deign to explain, my good master, this somewhat strange meeting which you say took place this morning, and also the occurrences of the day.'

Monsieur Jérôme Coignard consented to enlighten me as I wished. He did, as follows:

'You must know then, my son, that without hindrance I reached the top floor of the château along with this Monsieur d'Anquetil, whom I like well enough, though he is somewhat ill-mannered and illiterate. His mind is not acquainted with what is finest, nor curious beyond its depth. But the vivacity of youth sparkles agreeably in him and the generosity of his blood expends itself in amusing sallies. He knows the world as he knows women, from his upper station, and without philosophy. It is mere ingenuousness on his part to call himself an atheist. His impiety carries no malice and you will see it will vanish of itself when the heat of his feelings subsides. God has no other enemies in this soul than horses, cards, and women. In the soul of a true libertine, of a Monsieur Bayle, for instance, truth meets with more redoubtable

and cunning adversaries. But I see, my son, that I am drawing you a portrait or a character when what you want of me is but a plain recital.

'I will satisfy your wish. Having, then, reached the top floor of the château along with Monsieur d'Anquetil, I showed the young gentleman into your room, and I begged him, in accordance with our promise to him before the fountain, to make use of the room as if it were his own. He did so without more ado, undressed, and, merely retaining his boots, got into your bed, whose curtains he closed so as not to be troubled with the piercing light of early dawn, and was not long in falling asleep.

'As for me, my son, having reached my own room, although overcome with fatigue, I did not wish to taste repose before seeking in Boëthius a passage suitable to my situation. I found none quite fitting, and in truth the great Boëthius had no need to meditate on the disgrace of having broken a farmer-general's head with a bottle from his own cellar. But I gathered, from his admirable treatise, some maxims here and there which permitted of application to the present juncture. Whereupon, drawing my nightcap over my eyes, and recommending my soul to God, I fell asleep quite peacefully. After a period which seemed to me short, without my having had the means to measure it—for our actions are the sole measure of time, my son, which is, so to speak, suspended for us during sleep—I felt myself being pulled by the arm and heard a voice crying in my ear: "Eh! Abbé, eh! Abbé, wake up then!" I thought it was a police officer come to arrest me and take me before the magistrate, and I deliberated within myself if 'twere not better to break his head with my candlestick. It is unhappily but too true, my son, that once having left the straight path of gentleness and equity, where the sage walks with firm and prudent steps, one sees oneself forced to meet violence with violence and cruelty with cruelty, in such wise that the consequence of a first transgression is to produce others. We must bear this in mind if we are to understand the life of the Roman emperors, which Monsieur Crevier[1] has

[1] Historian, b. Paris, 1693–1765.

set down with exactitude. These princes were born no worse than other men. Caius, surnamed Caligula, lacked neither natural talent nor judgment, and was even capable of friendship. Nero had an innate love of virtue, and his temperament inclined him towards all that is just and sublime. A first transgression flung them, both one and the other, on the criminal path they followed to their wretched end. That is what Monsieur Crevier shows us in his book. I knew him as an able man when he taught literature at the college of Beauvais, as I should be doing to-day, had not my life been crossed by a thousand obstacles and had not my natural weakness of mind led me to divers snares wherein I fell. Monsieur Crevier, my son, was a man of pure life, he professed a severe morality, and I once heard him say that a woman who has broken her marriage vows is capable of the greatest crimes, such as murder and arson. I quote this maxim to give you an idea of the holy austerity of this priest. But I see I am wandering from the point and I hasten to take up my story where I left off. I thought, then, that the hand of the police was on me, and I already saw myself in the archbishop's prison, when I recognized the face and voice of Monsieur d'Anquetil. "Abbé," said the young gentleman, "a singular thing has just happened to me in Tournebroche's room. A woman entered the room while I was asleep, slipped into my bed, and awoke me with a rain of caresses, tender names, soft murmurings, and ardent kisses. I opened the curtains to distinguish the features of my good fortune. I saw she was dark, of a passionate eye, and the most beautiful creature in the world. But she then and there gave a loud cry, and fled away in vexation, not so quickly, though, but that I was enabled to rejoin her in the corridor and hold her in a close embrace. She began by defending herself and scratching my face; when I was scratched enough for the satisfaction of her honour we commenced explanations. She heard with pleasure that I was a gentleman and none so poor. I soon ceased to appear odious to her, and she had begun to wish me well when a scullion passing along the corridor caused her to fly without returning.

'"As far as I can see," added Monsieur d'Anquetil, "this adorable creature came, not for me but for another; she mistook the door, and her surprise was the reason for her fright. But I reassured her well and had it not been for the scullion I should have won her heart." I confirmed him in his supposition. We considered for whom this pretty person could well have come, and we were both of opinion that it must have been, as I have already told you, Tournebroche, for that old madman of a d'Astarac, who visits her secretly in a room near to yours and, maybe, unknown to you, in your own. Do you not think so?'

'Nothing is more likely,' I replied.

'There is no need to doubt it,' said my good master. 'This magician is making fools of us with his salamanders. And the truth is that he embraces that pretty girl. He is an impostor.'

I begged my good master to continue his recital. He did so readily.

'I abridge the discourse held with me by Monsieur d'Anquetil,' he said. 'It is the sign of a low and vulgar mind to enlarge on small events. On the contrary, we ought to put them into few words, tending to conciseness and keeping for moral instruction and exhortation the abundant rush of words, which it is then fitting to pour down like the snow from the mountains. So I shall have instructed you enough in Monsieur d'Anquetil's remarks when I tell you that he assured me he had found in this young girl a beauty, a charm, and an extraordinary grace. He ended his speech by asking me if I knew her name and who she was. "From the picture you have given me," I replied, "I recognize her as Jael, niece of the rabbi Mosaïde, whom I happened to embrace on the same staircase—with this difference, that it was between the second and third floors." "I hope," said Monsieur d'Anquetil, "that there are other differences, for I, for my part, held her close to me. I am also grieved to hear you say she is a Jewess. For, without believing in God, a certain instinct within me would prefer her to be a Christian. But what does one know of her? Who knows but what she may be a stolen child. Jews and gipsies go off with

them every day. And then one so often fails to remember that the blessed Virgin was a Jewess. Jewess or no, she pleases me. I want her and I will have her." Thus spoke the foolish youth. But, my son, permit me to take a seat on this moss-grown bank, for last night's work, my combats, and my flight have weakened my legs.'

He sat down, and drawing his empty snuff-box from his pocket looked at it sadly.

I sat down by him in a state of agitation and depression. His narrative caused me acute pain. I cursed the fate which had put a rough fellow in my place at the very moment when my beloved mistress came to seek me with all the appearance of ardent love, not knowing that I meanwhile was busied piling logs on the alchemist's stove. Jael's more than probable faithlessness cut me to the heart, and I could have wished that my good master had at least observed more discretion before my rival. I risked reproaching him respectfully for having revealed Jael's name.

'Monsieur,' I said, 'do you not think there was a certain imprudence in furnishing such information to so pleasure-loving and headstrong a gentleman?'

My good master appeared not to hear me.

'My snuff-box,' he said, 'unhappily burst open during the scuffle last night, and the snuff contained therein, mixed with wine in my pocket, is now no more than a disgusting mess. I dare not ask Crito to powder me a few leaves, the countenance of that old Rhadamanthus and serving-man appears so cold and severe. I suffer all the more at not being able to take snuff, since my nose tickles violently as a result of the blow I received last night, and you see me quite worried by this untimely solicitation to which I have nothing to give. I must bear this small misfortune with an equal mind, whilst waiting till Monsieur d'Anquetil gives me a few grains from his box. And, to return to this young gentleman, my son, he expressly said to me: "I love this girl. I would have you know, Abbé, that I shall take her with us in the post-chaise. If I have to stay here a week, a month, six months, or more, I shall not leave without her." I represented to him the dangers that

might be incurred by the least delay. But he answered me that those dangers concerned him the less that they were great for us but small for him. "You, Abbé," he said, "are in a fair way to be hanged with Tournebroche, while, as for me, I only risk being sent to the Bastille, where I shall find both cards and women, and whence my family will soon liberate me, for my father will interest some duchess or some dancer in my case, and, notwithstanding my mother having become pious, she will know how, on my behalf, to bring herself to the memory of two or three princes of the blood. So it is a settled thing: I leave with Jael, or I do not leave at all. You are at liberty, Abbé, to hire a post-chaise with Tournebroche."

'The wretch well knew, my son, that we had not the means to do so. I tried to make him go back on his word. I was pressing, unctuous, and even exhortatory. It was pure waste, and in vain I made use of an eloquence which, in the pulpit of a good parish church, would have been worth both honour and money to me. Alas, my son, it is decreed that none of my actions should bear good fruit in this world, and it is for me that it is written in Ecclesiastes: 'Quid habet amplius homo de universo labore suo, quo laborat sub sole?' Far from making him more reasonable, my speech strengthened this young gentleman in his obstinacy, and I will not conceal the fact from you, my son, that he made it plain to me that he counted on me absolutely for the success of his wishes, and that he pressed me to go and find Jael, so as to persuade her to agree to an elopement with the promise of a trousseau of fine linen, plate, jewels, and a good yearly income.'

'Oh, monsieur,' I exclaimed, 'this Monsieur d'Anquetil is uncommonly insolent. What do you think Jael will reply to these proposals when she hears of them?'

'My son,' he replied, 'she knows them by this time, and I think will agree to them.'

'In that case,' I replied quickly, 'we must warn Mosaïde.'

'Mosaïde,' answered my master, 'is only too well warned. You heard a little time ago, in the neighbourhood of the cottage, the last outburst of his anger.'

'What, monsieur,' I said, deeply moved, 'you warned that Jew of the dishonour about to touch his family? It was just like you! Allow me to embrace you. But then, Mosaïde's wrath, of which we were witness, threatened Monsieur d'Anquetil, and not you?'

'My son,' replied the Abbé, in an honest and noble manner, 'a natural indulgence for human frailty, an obliging gentleness, the imprudent benevolence of a heart too easily touched, all these lead men oftentimes to ill-considered measures, and expose them to the severity of the world's empty judgment. I will not hide from you, Tournebroche, that, yielding to the young gentleman's earnest appeals, I obligingly promised to go and find Jael for him, and to neglect nothing to make her agree to an elopement.'

'Alas,' I exclaimed, 'and you fulfilled that dismal promise! I cannot tell you to what extent your action wounds and afflicts me!'

'Tournebroche,' answered my good master sternly, 'you speak like a Pharisee. A divine, amiable as he was austere, has said: "Turn your eyes upon yourself, and beware of judging the actions of others. Judging others, one works in vain; one is often mistaken, and easily falls into sin, whereas in self-examination and self-judgment the occupation is profitable." It is written: "Thou shalt not fear the judgment of men." And St Paul the Apostle has said: "It is a very small thing that I should be judged . . . of men's judgment." And if I thus lecture on the finest moral texts, it is to instruct you, Tournebroche, and to recall you to the humble and gentle modesty which suits you, and not to make myself appear innocent, weighed down and overcome as I am by the multitude of my sins. It is hard not to slip into sin, and it befits us not to fall into despair at each step we take in this world where all participate equally in the original curse, and in the redemption effected by the blood of the Son of God. I do not want to lend colour to my faults, and I confess to you that the embassy which I undertook on behalf of Monsieur d'Anquetil proceeds from the fall of Eve, and is, so to speak, one of the innumerable consequences of it,

conflicting with the dolorous and abject opinion I hold of it at present, which is drawn from the desire and hope of my eternal salvation. For you must imagine mankind balanced between damnation and redemption, and tell yourself that I am at this moment at the right end of the see-saw, after being at the wrong end this morning. I own, then, that having taken the mandragora path, which leads to Mosaïde's cottage, I hid myself behind a thorn-bush waiting for Jael to appear at her window. She soon showed herself. I discovered myself and signed to her to come down. She came and found me behind the bush at a time when she thought to deceive the vigilance of her old guardian. There, I told her in a low voice the night's adventures, of which she was still in ignorance, I made known to her the designs the impetuous young man had upon her, I represented to her that it was necessary in his interest as well as in yours and mine, Tournebroche, that she should assure our flight by her own departure. I dangled before her eyes Monsieur d'Anquetil's promises. "If," said I, "you consent to follow him to-night, you shall have a good yearly income from State funds, a trousseau richer than that of an opera singer or of an abbess of Panthémont, and a fine service of silver plate." "He takes me for a light woman," she said. "He is over-bold." "He loves you," I replied. "Do you wish to be worshipped?" "I must have a silver centre-piece and a massive one. Did he speak to you of that? Go and tell him, Monsieur l'Abbé." "What shall I tell him?" "That I am an honest woman." "What more?" "That he is very forward!" "Is that all? Jael, think of our safety!" "Tell him, then, I only consent to go providing a note in proper form is signed the evening before." "He will sign it. Consider it done." "No, Abbé, nothing can be done until he undertakes to give me lessons with Monsieur Couperin. I want to learn music."

'We were at this clause of our conference when, as ill luck had it, the aged Mosaïde surprised us, and without hearing our conversation divined its drift. For he began to call me suborner and to load me with abuse. Jael ran to hide in her room, and I remained alone exposed to the

fury of this deicide, in the state in which you saw me and whence you extricated me. Truth to tell, the affair was, so to speak, concluded, the elopement agreed upon, our flight assured. The Wheels and the Beasts of Ezekiel shall not prevail against the silver centre-piece. I only fear lest that old Mordecai has shut up his niece behind triple bolts and bars.'

'In truth,' I replied, without being able to disguise my satisfaction, 'I heard a great noise of keys and bolts at the very moment when I drew you from among the thorns. But is it really true that Jael agreed so quickly to proposals which were far from honest and must have cost you something to transmit to her? It confounds me. Tell me once more, my good master, did she not speak of me, did she not pronounce my name, sighing, or otherwise?'

'No, my son,' replied Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, 'she did not pronounce it, at least not perceptibly. Neither did I hear her murmur that of Monsieur d'Astarac, her lover, which should have been more present with her than yours. But be not surprised that she should forget her alchemist. The mere possessing of a woman does not suffice to imprint upon her mind any profound or durable impression. Minds are almost impenetrable to one another, and this shows you the cruel emptiness of love. The wise man will say to himself: I am as nothing in the nothing that this creature is. To hope to leave a memory in the heart of a woman is to try to stamp the imprint of a seal on the face of running water. Let us, then, beware of setting our hearts upon what passes away, and lay hold on that which is undying.'

'Anyway,' I replied, 'Jael is under lock and key, and we may trust to the vigilance of her guardian.'

'My son,' continued my good master, 'this very night she should join us at the "Cheval-Rouge." Darkness is propitious to escapes, ravishments, furtive attempts, and clandestine actions. We must rely on the cunning of this girl. As to yourself, take care that you are at the cross-roads of Les Bergères at twilight. You know that Monsieur d'Anquetil is not patient and that he is just the man to go off without you.'

As he gave me this advice, the bell rang for breakfast.

'Have you not a needle and thread?' he asked me. 'My clothes are torn in several places, and before I appear at table I should like to restore them, with a few stitches, to their former decency. My breeches particularly disquiet me. They are so injured that unless I come to their assistance promptly it will be all over with them.'

XVIII

So I took my usual place at the cabbalist's table with the distressing thought that it was for the last time. Jael's black treachery weighed on my heart. 'Alas,' I said to myself, 'my dearest wish was to fly with her. There was no likelihood of its being realized. Nevertheless it is to be, and in the most cruel fashion.' And I fell to admiring once again my good master's wisdom, who, one day I wanted too keenly that something should succeed, answered me with these words from the Bible: 'Et tribuit eis petitionem eorum.' My sorrows and my anxieties took away all my appetite and I hardly put the various viands to my lips. However, my good master kept his unalterable suavity of mind.

He overflowed with agreeable conversation, and one would have said that he was one of those sages shown to us in *Télémaque* conversing in the shades of the Elysian Fields, rather than a man sought for as a murderer and reduced to a wretched and wandering life. Monsieur d'Astarac, thinking I had passed the night at the cook-shop, asked me kindly for news of my good parents, and as he could not abstract himself for a moment from his visions he added:

'When I speak of that cook as your father it is to be understood that I express myself thus according to the world and not according to nature. For there is nothing to prove, my son, that you were not fathered by a sylph. It is, indeed, what I should prefer to believe, if only your still youthful talent grows in strength and beauty.'

'Oh, do not speak thus, monsieur,' replied my good

master with a smile; 'you will force him to hide his wits that he may not injure his mother's good name. But, if you knew her better, you would think as I do that she has never had any dealings with a sylph; she is a good Christian who has known no man but her husband, and who bears her good character written on her face, very different from that other cook's wife, Madame Quonian, of whom there was much talk in Paris and the provinces in the days of my youth. Did you never hear of her, monsieur? She had the Sieur Mariette for a lover, he who later became secretary to Monsieur d'Angervilliers. He was a great man, who, each time that he saw his lady-love, left her some bauble as a remembrance—one day a Cross of Lorraine or of the Holy Ghost, another day a watch or a châtelaine, or, yet again, a handkerchief, a fan, a casket; he stripped the jewellers' and drapers' shops at the fair of Saint-Germain for her, till at last the cook, seeing his wife decked like a shrine, had a suspicion that it was not all honestly come by. He watched her and it was not long before he surprised her with her lover. You must understand that the husband was a mere jealous wretch. He was angry, and gained nothing thereby—quite the contrary. For the two lovers, annoyed by this outcry, swore to be rid of him.

'The Sieur Mariette had a long arm. He obtained a warrant against the wretched Quonian. Meanwhile, the treacherous wife said to her husband: "Take me to dine in the country next Sunday, I beg of you. I look forward with pleasure to this little excursion."

'She was loving and urgent. The husband, flattered, agreed to what she asked. Sunday came, he mounted into a ramshackle carriage with her to go to Les Porcherons. But scarcely had they reached Le Roule, when a squad of police, posted there by Mariette, arrested him and took him to Bicêtre, whence he was sent out to the Mississippi, where he is still. They made a song about it which ended thus:

Wise husbands will live undistressed
Nor open their eyes over-wide.
It is better to be as the rest,
Than to see Mississippi's far tide.

'And that, no doubt, is the most valuable lesson to be drawn from the case of poor Quonian of the spit.

'As for the incident itself, it only wants telling by a Petronius or an Apuleius to equal the best of the Milesian fables. The moderns are inferior to the ancients in tragedy and the epic. But, if we fail to surpass the Greeks and Latins in the art of the story, it is not the fault of the ladies of Paris, who never tire of enriching the subject-matter by many ingenious turns and pleasing inventions. You are not without knowledge of Boccaccio's collection of tales, monsieur: I have often read them for amusement's sake and I assure you that if the Florentine lived in France to-day he would make poor Quonian's misfortune the subject of one of his most amusing stories. For my part, I have only recounted it while sitting here to make brighter by contrast the virtue of Madame Léonard Ménétrier, who is the pride of her husband's profession as Madame Quonian was the shame of it. Madame Ménétrier, I dare make the assertion, has never been wanting in the lesser virtues whose practice is recommended in marriage, which alone of the seven sacraments is contemptible.'

'I do not deny it,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac. 'But this Madame Ménétrier would be still more estimable had she had dealings with a sylph, after the example of Semiramis, Olympias, and the mother of the great Pope Sylvester II.'

'Ah, monsieur,' said Abbé Coignard, 'you are always talking of sylphs and salamanders. In good faith, have you ever seen them?'

'As well as I see you,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac, 'and even nearer, at least as regards the salamanders.'

'Monsieur,' continued my good master, 'still that is not enough for us to believe in their existence, which is contrary to the teachings of the Church. For we may be led astray by illusions. Our eyes and all our senses are but messengers of error and bearers of falsehood. They deceive us far more than they instruct us. They show us but uncertain and fugitive pictures. Truth escapes them; deriving from the eternal principle, truth is invisible as that principle is.'

'Ah,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'I did not know you were such a philosopher nor of so subtle a mind.'

'Truly,' said my good master, 'there are days when my soul seems heavier, and more attached to the bed and the board. But last night I broke a bottle over the head of a revenue officer, and it has freshened my wits to an extraordinary degree. I feel capable of scattering the ghosts which haunt you and of blowing away all these vapours. For, indeed, monsieur, these sylphs are but the exhalations of your brain.'

Monsieur d'Astarac stopped him with a quiet gesture and said:

'Pardon me, Monsieur l'Abbé, but do you believe in demons?'

'I can reply to that without any difficulty,' said my good master, 'for I believe all that is told us of demons in good books, and I reject as error and superstition all beliefs in spells, amulets, and exorcisms. St Augustine tells us that when Scripture exhorts us to resist the devil, it means we should resist our evil passions and our unbridled appetites. Nothing is more detestable than all these bedevilments with which monks terrorize honest women.'

'I see,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'that you endeavour to think like an honest man. You hate the coarse superstitions of the monks as much as I detest them myself. But, still, you believe in demons, and I had no difficulty in making you avow it. Know then that they are none other than sylphs and salamanders. Ignorance and fear have disfigured them in the imaginations of the timid. But, in reality, they are beautiful and virtuous. I will not put you in the way of meeting with the salamanders, not being sufficiently assured of the purity of your morals; but there is nothing to hinder me from inducing you to frequent the sylphs, Monsieur l'Abbé, they who inhabit the realms of the air, and who approach men willingly in so benevolent and affectionate a spirit that it has been possible to call them the helpful genii. Far from urging us towards our ruin, as theologians believe who take them to be devils, they protect and guard their earthly friends from all peril. I could give you an infinite number of examples

of the help they give. But as there must be a limit I will permit myself but one story which I have from Madame la Maréchale de Grancey herself. She was of a certain age, and had been a widow for some years, when one night in bed she received a visit from a sylph, who said to her: "Madame, make search in the wardrobe of your late husband. In the pocket of one of his pairs of knee-breeches will be found a letter which, were its contents known, would prove the undoing of Monsieur des Roches, your good friend and mine. See that it is given to you, and take care to burn it."

'The Maréchale promised to follow this advice, and asked the sylph for news of the defunct Maréchal, but he disappeared without replying. When she awoke she called her women to her and sent them to see if there were any clothes of the Maréchal's remaining in his wardrobe. They replied that there were none, and that the lackeys had sold them all to the old-clothes man. Madame de Grancey insisted that they should search and see if they could not find at least one pair of knee-breeches.

'Having ransacked every corner, they discovered at last an old pair of black taffeta breeches which laced up in the fashion of a former time; these they brought to the Maréchale. The latter put her hand in one of the pockets and drew out a letter, which she opened and found therein more than was necessary to ensure Monsieur des Roches being sent to a State prison. She made all speed to throw this letter in the fire. Thus, the gentleman was saved by his good friends, the sylph and the Maréchale.

'I ask you, Monsieur l'Abbé, were those the ways of a demon? But I will give you an instance which will appeal to you more, and which I feel certain will touch the heart of a learned man like yourself. You are well aware that the Academy of Dijon is rich in men of able minds. One of them, whose name is not known to you, who lived in the last century, was spending learned vigils on an edition of Pindar. One night when he had worked desperately on five lines whose meaning he could not unravel, the text being very corrupt, he fell asleep despairingly at cock-crow. During his slumber a sylph, who loved him,

transported him in spirit to Stockholm, introduced him into the palace of Queen Christina, led him to the library, and drawing a manuscript of Pindar from one of the shelves opened it for him at the difficult passage. The five lines were there with two or three true readings which made them quite intelligible.

'In his vehement joy the learned man awoke, struck a light, and immediately set down the lines in pencil as he remembered them. Whereupon he slept profoundly. The next day, reflecting upon his nocturnal adventure, he resolved to get light on it. Monsieur Descartes was in Sweden at the time, with the queen, to whom he was teaching his philosophy. Our Pindarist was acquainted with him; but he was on a more familiar footing with the King of Sweden's ambassador in France—one Monsieur Chanut. He addressed himself to the latter to forward a letter to Monsieur Descartes, in which he begged him to tell him if there was really a manuscript of Pindar in the queen's library at Stockholm containing the different reading he now indicated. Monsieur Descartes, who was extremely civil, replied to the academician of Dijon that Her Majesty did in truth possess such a manuscript, and that he himself had read therein the lines with the different readings contained in the letter.'

Monsieur d'Astarac, having related this story while peeling an apple, looked at Abbé Coignard to see the success of his speech.

My good master smiled.

'Ah, monsieur,' said he, 'I see that I flattered myself a moment ago with a vain hope, and we shall never make you renounce your chimeras. I grant you with a good grace that you have shown us an ingenious sylph, and I should like to have so pleasing a secretary. His help would be particularly useful to me in one or two passages of Zozimus the Panopolitan which are extremely obscure. Could you not give me the means of invoking at need some library sylph as handy as the one at Dijon?'

Monsieur d'Astarac replied gravely:

''Tis a secret, Monsieur l'Abbé, which I will confide

to you willingly. But I warn you that if you impart it to the profane your ruin is certain.'

'Have no fear,' said the Abbé. 'I am very anxious to know such a valuable secret, although, to speak plainly, I expect no result, not believing in your sylphs. So instruct me if you please.'

'You demand it?' said the cabbalist. 'Know, then, that when you wish for help from a sylph you have but to pronounce the one word "Agla." Immediately the sons of the air will fly towards you, but you will understand, Monsieur l'Abbé, that this word must be spoken from the heart as well as with the lips, and that in faith lies all its virtue. Without faith, it is but an empty murmur. And as I have just said it, without either expression or desire, it has, even in my mouth, but feeble power, and at most some sons of the morning, hearing it, have trailed their light shadows through the room. I rather guessed at than perceived them; I saw them on that curtain, and they vanished before they took shape. Neither you nor your pupil suspected their presence. But had I pronounced the magic word with true expression you would have seen them appear in all their glory. They are of entrancing beauty. Here, Monsieur l'Abbé, you have from me a great and useful secret. Once more let me beg you not to divulge it imprudently. And do not overlook the case of the Abbé de Villars, who, for having revealed their secrets, was assassinated by the sylphs on the Lyons road.'

'On the Lyons road,' said my good master. 'That is strange!'

Monsieur d'Astarac left us in his sudden fashion.

'I mean to ascend once more,' said the Abbé, 'to that august library where I tasted such austere delights and which I shall never see again. Do not fail, Tournebroche, to be at the cross-roads of Les Bergères at nightfall.'

I promised not to fail him; I had planned to shut myself up in my room to write to Monsieur d'Astarac and my good parents that they must forgive my not taking leave of them, fleeing as I did after an adventure in which I had been more unfortunate than culpable.

But on the landing I heard snores issuing from my room and on opening the door I saw Monsieur d'Anquetil asleep on my bed—his sword against the bed post and playing cards spread all over the coverlet. I felt a desire for the moment to stab him with his own sword, but this notion was dissipated as soon as born and I let him sleep, smiling to myself, in my sorrow, at the thought that Jael, shut behind triple bolts, could not come and join him.

I went into my good master's room to write my letters, where I disturbed five or six rats who were nibbling the volume of Boëthius on the bedside table. I wrote to Monsieur d'Astarac and to my mother, and I composed a most affecting letter for Jael. I re-read it and wet it with my tears. 'Perchance,' I said to myself, 'the faithless one will mingle hers with them.'

Then, overcome with fatigue and melancholy, I threw myself on my good master's mattress and was not long in falling into a half-slumber, troubled by dreams at once amorous and gloomy. I was roused from my slumbers by the speechless Crito, who entered the room and held out to me on a silver tray an iris-scented curl-paper, where I read a few words written in pencil in an awkward hand. I was wanted outside on urgent business. The note was signed: 'Brother Ange, unworthy monk.'

I ran to the green door and I found the little brother in the road sitting beside the ditch in a pitiable state of prostration. Not having the strength to rise at my approach, he turned on me the dog-like gaze of two big eyes, almost human, and drowned in tears. His beard and chest heaved beneath his sighs. He said to me in a tone full of grief:

'Alas, Monsieur Jacques, the hour of trial has come to Babylon, as was spoken by the prophets. On information given by Monsieur de la Guéritaude to the head of the police, Catherine was taken to the reformatory by the officers and will be sent to America in the next convoy. I had the news from Jeannette, the hurdy-gurdy player, who, at the moment when Catherine arrived in the cart at the reformatory, was just leaving it herself, after having been kept there through illness of which she is now cured by the

surgeons' art—at least if God wills. As regards Catherine, she will be sent to the islands without mercy.'

And at this point of his story Brother Ange cried copiously. After trying to stop his tears with kind words, I asked him if he had nothing else to tell me.

'Alas, Monsieur Jacques,' he replied, 'I have told you what was most essential, and the rest floats in my head like the Spirit of God on the waters—though I mean no comparison. It is all obscure chaos. Catherine's misfortune has destroyed all feeling in me. Nevertheless, I must have had news of some importance to communicate to you, thus to risk coming to the door of this cursed house, where you live in company with all kinds of devils, and it was with terror, after reciting the prayer to St Francis, that I dared raise the knocker to give a servant the note I had written to you. I do not know if you have been able to read it, I am so little accustomed to forming letters, and the paper was not good to write upon, but it is the pride of our sacred Order not to yield to the vanities of the age. Oh, Catherine in the reformatory! Catherine in America! Is it not enough to melt the hardest heart? Jeannette herself was crying her eyes out over it, although she is jealous of Catherine, who outshines her in beauty and youth as St Francis surpasses all other saints in holiness. Ah, Monsieur Jacques! Catherine in America, such are the extraordinary ways of Providence. Alas, holy religion says truth, and King David was right when he said that all flesh was grass, since Catherine is in the reformatory. These stones on which I sit are happier than I, although I am clad as a Christian and even as a monk. Catherine in the reformatory!'

He sobbed afresh. I waited till the violence of his grief had abated and I asked him if he had news of my dear parents.

'Monsieur Jacques,' he answered, 'it is they who sent me to you charged with an urgent message. I must tell you they are not at all happy; it is the fault of Maître Léonard, your father, who passes all the days God gives him in drinking and in play. And the savoury steam of chickens and geese no longer rises, as once, towards the

Queen Pédauque, whose picture swings dismally in the wet and rusting winds. Where are the days gone when your father's cook-shop would scent the rue Saint-Jacques from the 'Petit Bacchus' to the 'Trois Pucelles'? Since that sorcerer entered there everything wastes away, man and beast, as a result of the spell he cast on it. And divine vengeance has begun to manifest itself in the place ever since that fat Abbé Coignard was received, whilst I, on the contrary, was turned out. It was the primary cause of the evil, which came from Abbé Coignard being so proud of the depth of his knowledge and of the elegance of his manners. For pride is the source of all sin. Your sainted mother did very wrong, Monsieur Jacques, not to be satisfied with the lessons I charitably gave you, which would without doubt have made you capable of ruling the kitchen, handling the larding-pin, and bearing the banner of the guild after the Christian death of your father, whose last service and funeral cannot be long delayed—for all life is transitory and he drinks exceedingly hard.'

The news caused me a grief easy to understand. I mingled my tears with the little brother's. At the same time, I asked him for news of my good mother.

'God,' he made reply, 'who was pleased to afflict Rachel in Ramah, has sent your mother, Monsieur Jacques, divers tribulations for the good of her soul, and for the purpose of chastising Maître Léonard for his sin, when in my person he wickedly drove Jesus Christ from the cook-shop. For He has transferred the greater part of the purchasers of poultry and pasties to Madame Quonian's daughter, who turns the spit at the other end of the rue Saint-Jacques. Your respected mother sees with sorrow that He has blessed that house at the expense of her own, which is so deserted now that moss all but covers the doorstep. She is upheld in her trials firstly by her devotion to St Francis, and secondly, by the thought of your success in the world, where you wear a sword like a man of quality.

'But this second consolation was greatly diminished this morning, when the police came to seek you at the shop to take you to Bicêtre to pound lime for a year or

two. It was Catherine who denounced you to Monsieur de la Guéritaude, but one must not blame her: she merely confessed the truth, which it was her duty to do, seeing she is a Christian. She named you and Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard as Monsieur d'Anquetil's accomplices, and gave a faithful account of the murders and carnage of that awful night. Alas, her candour availed her nothing and she was taken to the reformatory! It is horrible to think about it.'

At this point in his story, the little brother put his head in his hands and cried afresh.

Night had fallen. I feared to miss the rendezvous. Dragging the little brother out of the ditch where he was half buried, I put him on his feet and begged him to continue his narrative while accompanying me on the Saint-Germain road, as far as the cross-roads of Les Bergères. He acceded willingly, and walking sadly beside me asked me to try and unravel the tangled thread of his thoughts. I led him back to the point when the police came to take me at the cook-shop.

'Not finding you,' he continued, 'they wanted to take your father in your place. Maître Léonard pretended he did not know where you were hidden, your respected mother said the same thing, with many vows. May God forgive her, Monsieur Jacques, for she was evidently perjuring herself. The police began to be angry. Your father made them listen to reason by giving them drink. And they parted quite good friends. During this time, your mother went and fetched me from the 'Trois Pucelles,' where I was begging in accordance with the holy rules of my Order. She sent me with all haste to you to warn you to fly without delay, for fear that the lieutenant of police should discover the house where you are living.'

While listening to these gloomy words, I hastened my steps and we had already crossed the Neuilly bridge.

On the somewhat steep hill, which leads up to the cross-roads whose elms we could already distinguish, the little brother continued talking in an exhausted voice.

'Your worthy mother,' he said, 'especially commanded me to warn you of the peril which threatens you and she

gave me a little bag for you, which I hid under my gown. I cannot find it, though,' he added, after feeling himself all over. 'And how can you expect me to find anything after losing Catherine? She had a great devotion to St Francis and was very charitable. Yet they have treated her as a harlot, and will shave her head, and it is terrible to think that she will come to look like a dressmaker's dummy and that in that state she will be shipped to America, where she will run the risk of dying of fever or being eaten by savage cannibals.'

He finished his recital with a sigh as we reached the cross-roads. On our left, the 'Cheval Rouge' lifted above a double row of elms its slate-covered roof and dormer windows provided with pulleys, and through the trees one saw the carriage entrance wide open. I slackened my steps, and the little brother sank down under a tree.

'Brother Ange,' said I, 'you spoke of a packet my good mother begged you to give me.'

'She did, indeed, ask me to do so,' replied the little brother, 'and I have put the packet away so carefully somewhere that I do not know where it can be, but please believe, Monsieur Jacques, that I can only have lost it through overmuch precaution.'

I answered him impetuously that he could not have lost it, and if he did not immediately find it I would help him myself to look for it.

He was not insensible to the tone of my words, for with a heavy sigh he drew from under his gown a small calico bag which he regretfully held out to me. I found therein a crown piece and a medal of the Black Virgin of Chartres, which I kissed while shedding tears of emotion and repentance. Meanwhile the little brother was drawing packets of coloured pictures out of all of his pockets, and prayers decorated with rough drawings. He picked out two or three which he offered to me in preference to the others as being more useful, in his opinion, for pilgrims and travellers and all wandering people.

'They are blessed,' he told me, 'and efficacious when in danger of death or sickness, either by repeating them aloud or by touching and placing them on the skin. I give them

to you, Monsieur Jacques, for the love of God. Remember to give me some alms. Do not forget that I beg in the name of St Francis. He will take you under his protection without fail, if you assist his most unworthy son—which I certainly am.'

While he spoke in this fashion, I saw in the fading light of day a berlin with four horses drive out of the carriage entrance of the 'Cheval Rouge' and draw up with noisy crackings of the whip and neighing of horses at the roadside, quite near to the tree under which Brother Ange was seated. I noticed then that it was not exactly a berlin, but a big carriage with seats for four people, and a rather small coupé in front. I had been looking at it for a minute or two, when I saw Monsieur d'Anquetil climbing up the hill accompanied by Jael, in a mob cap, carrying some bundles under her cloak, and followed by Monsieur Coignard laden with five or six ancient books wrapped in an old manuscript. At their approach the postilions let down the steps, and my pretty mistress, drawing up her skirts like a balloon, hoisted herself into the coupé, pushed from behind by Monsieur d'Anquetil.

At this sight I ran forward crying:

'Stop, Jael! Stop, monsieur!'

But the seducer merely pushed the faithless one the harder, and her charming figure was soon lost to sight. Then, preparing to join her, one foot on the step, he looked at me in surprise:

'Ah, Monsieur Tournebroche! You would take all my mistresses from me! First Catherine and then Jael. I vow it must be a wager.'

But I took no notice of him and I still called on Jael, while Brother Ange, having risen from the shade of his elm-tree, went and stood by the door offering Monsieur d'Anquetil pictures of St Roch, the prayer to recite while horses are being shod, and the prayer against erysipelas, and asked for alms in a mournful voice.

I should have remained there all night, calling on Jael, if my good master had not drawn me towards him and pushed me into the body of the carriage, whither he followed me.

'Leave them the coupé,' he said, 'and let us travel together in this roomy body. I sought you for a long time, Tournebroche, and I will not disguise the fact that we were going without you, when I perceived you and the monk under the tree. We can tarry no longer, for Monsieur de la Guéritaude is searching busily for us. And he has a long arm—he lends money to the king.'

The berlin was already moving, and Brother Ange, hanging on to the door with outstretched hand, pursued us, begging for alms.

I sank back on the cushions.

'Alas, monsieur,' I exclaimed, 'you told me that Jael was imprisoned behind triple bolts.'

'My son,' replied my good master, 'you ought not to have such confidence in them, for young women make light of jealousy and padlocks. And if the door is shut they jump from the window. You have no idea, Tournebroche, of the cunning of women. The ancient writers have given us many admirable examples, and you will find several in the book of Apuleius, where they are like salt seasoning the narrative of the Golden Ass. But where this cunning is best to be seen is in an Arabian tale which Monsieur Galand has lately made known to Europe, and which I will relate to you:

'Schariar, Sultan of Tartary, and his brother Schahzenan, were walking one day by the sea, when they suddenly espied a black column rising above the waters and advancing towards the land. They recognized a genie of the fiercest kind, in the form of a giant of prodigious height, bearing on his head a glass box fastened with four iron locks. This sight inspired them with such fear that they went and hid in the fork of a tree that was near. Meanwhile the genie stepped on to the beach with the box, which he carried to the foot of the tree where the two princes were hid. Then, lying down himself, he was not long in falling asleep. His legs stretched as far as the sea and his breathing shook heaven and earth. While he took his repose in this terrifying manner, the lid of the box was lifted and out stepped a lady of majestic figure and perfect beauty. She raised her head——'

At this point I interrupted the story, to which I was scarcely listening.

'Ah, monsieur,' I cried, 'what do you think Jael and Monsieur d'Anquetil are saying to one another now, alone in the coupé?'

'I do not know,' replied my good master, 'that is their business, not ours. But let us finish this Arabian tale, which is full of meaning. You thoughtlessly interrupted me, Tournebroche, at the moment when the lady, raising her head, discovered the two princes in the tree where they were hidden. She made signs to them to come to her, and, seeing them hesitate, divided between desire to respond to the appeal of so beautiful a person and fear of approaching so terrible a giant, she said to them in a low but animated voice: "Come down at once, or I will wake the genie!" They understood by her imperious and resolute look that it was no mere threat and that the safest and most agreeable way was to come down. They did so, taking all possible precautions not to wake the genie. When they got down, the lady took them by the hand, and going a little way off with them she made them clearly understand she was ready to give herself straightway to both one and the other. They lent themselves with a good grace to this fancy, and as they were men of stout heart their fears did not spoil their pleasure. Having obtained all she wished, and, noticing that each wore a ring on his finger, she asked for it. Then returning to the box wherein she dwelt she drew forth a chaplet of rings which she showed to the princes.

'"Do you know," she said to them, "the meaning of these threaded rings? They are those of all the men to whom I have been as gracious as to you. There are ninety-eight all told, which I keep in remembrance of them. I asked you for yours for the same reason and to make up the hundred. So there," she said, "are a hundred lovers whom I have had up to now, despite the vigilance and care of this wicked genie who never leaves me. Let him shut me in a glass case and keep me hidden at the bottom of the sea, I deceive him as often as I please."

'This ingenious apologue,' added my good master,

'shows you woman to be as cunning in the East, where she is kept in seclusion, as amongst the Europeans, where she is free. If one of them has formed a scheme, neither husband, lover, father, uncle, nor guardian can prevent its being carried out. You need not be surprised then, my son, that to betray the vigilance of that old Mordecai was but mere play for Jael who, with her perverse talent, combines the skill of our courtesans with Oriental perfidy. I suspect her to be as greedy for pleasure as she is for gold and silver, and worthy of the race of Aholah and Aholibah.

'Her beauty bites and stings the senses, and I myself feel it in some degree, though age, sublime meditation, and the wretchedness of a troubled life have much deadened the sentiment of carnal pleasure in me. Judging by the pain that the success of her adventure with Monsieur d'Anquetil causes you, my son, I conclude that you feel the piercing fang of desire far more keenly than I do, and that you are torn with jealousy. That is why you blame an action, irregular it is true, and contrary to vulgar convention, but indifferent in itself or at least which adds little to the universal ill. You condemn me in your heart for having had a share in it, and you think you uphold the moral view of the question when you are but following the prompting of your passions. So do we colour our worst instincts in our own eyes, my son. The morals of mankind have no other origin. Nevertheless, confess that it would have been a pity to leave such a handsome girl any longer to that old madman. Agree that Monsieur d'Anquetil, young and handsome as he is, is better suited to such a charming person, and be resigned to what you cannot prevent. Such philosophy is difficult, but it would be still more so were it your mistress who had been taken. Then you would feel teeth of iron torturing your flesh and your mind would be filled with odious and over-definite pictures. These considerations, my son, should mitigate your present suffering. For the matter of that, life is full of pain and suffering. That is what has made us conceive a justifiable hope of eternal beatitude.'

Thus spoke my good master, while the elms lining the royal road fled past us on either side. I refrained from

telling him that he merely irritated me in wishing to ease my woes and that unconsciously he touched an open wound.

Our first relay was at Juvisy, where we arrived in the rain in the early morning. Entering the posting inn, I found Jael in the chimney corner, where five or six chickens were turning on three spits. She was warming her feet and showing a little bit of silk stocking, which greatly disturbed me by the thought of the leg that I pictured to myself, the fine grain of the skin, and its down and all sorts of arresting details.

Monsieur d'Anquetil leant over the back of her chair, his cheek on his hand. He was calling her his life and his soul, he asked her if she were not hungry, and when she replied that she was, he went out to give orders. Left alone with the faithless one, I looked into her eyes, which reflected the flame of the fire.

'Ah, Jael!' I exclaimed, 'I am very unhappy; you have deceived me, and you love me no longer.'

'Who has told you that I love you no longer?' she replied, looking at me with a glance of velvet and of flame.

'Alas, mademoiselle, it is sufficiently apparent in your behaviour.'

'What, Jacques! do you mean to say you grudge me the outfit of fine Dutch linen and the embossed plate this gentleman is going to give me? I ask you only to be discreet until his promises are realized, and you shall see me what I was at the Cross of Les Sablons.'

'Alas, Jael, meanwhile, my rival will enjoy your favours.'

'I feel,' said she, 'that he will not mean much to me, and nothing can efface the memory I have of you. Do not torment yourself about such trifles; they are only of value by your idea of them.'

'Oh,' I exclaimed, 'the very idea is terrible to me, and I fear I shall not survive your treachery.'

She looked at me in sympathetic raillery and said, smiling:

'Believe me, my friend, we shall neither of us die of it. Bethink yourself, Jacques, that I must have linen and plate. Be prudent, do not allow the feelings which trouble you

to be seen, and I promise to reward you for your discretion later.'

This hope somewhat softened my consuming grief. Mine hostess came and laid the lavender-scented cloth, and put the tin plates, goblets, and jugs on the table. I was very hungry, and when Monsieur d'Anquetil came into the inn with the Abbé, and invited us to eat something, I took my place willingly between Jael and my good master. In fear of being pursued, we left after hastily devouring three omelets and two small chickens. It was agreed upon that in this pressing danger we should not halt until we got to Sens, where we decided to spend the night.

I had horrible thoughts of this night, thinking it was to witness the consummation of Jael's treachery. And this only too legitimate apprehension troubled me to such an extent that I lent but a distracted attention to my good master's speech — whom the smallest incidents of the journey inspired with admirable reflections.

My fears were not vain. Alighting at Sens, at the wretched hostelry of the 'Homme-Armé,' scarcely had we eaten our supper when Monsieur d'Anquetil led Jael away to his room, which happened to be next to mine, and I could not taste a moment's repose. I rose at dawn, and fleeing this hateful room I went and sat down mournfully in the carriage entrance amid the post-boys, who were drinking white wine and teasing the maidservants. There I remained for two or three hours meditating on my troubles. The horses were already put to, when Jael appeared under the archway, shivering under her black cloak. I could not bear to look at her. I turned away my eyes. She came up to me, and sitting down by me on the stone post said gently that I was not to distress myself, that what I imagined to be so monstrous was really nothing much, that one must be guided by reason, that I was too sensible a man to want a woman to myself alone, and that in that case one took a housekeeper with neither wit nor beauty, and even then there was great risk to be run.

'I must leave you,' she added, 'I hear Monsieur d'Anquetil's step on the stairs.'

And she gave me a kiss on the mouth which she lingered

over and prolonged in a rapture of fear, for her lover's boots were creaking on the stairs near us, and the pretty gambler was risking the loss of her Dutch linen and embossed silver centre-piece.

The postilion lowered the step of the coupé, but Monsieur d'Anquetil asked Jael if it would not be pleasanter for all to sit together in the body of the carriage, and it did not escape me that this was the first result of his intimacy with Jael, and that a fulfilling of his desires had rendered solitude with her less attractive. My good master had taken care to borrow five or six bottles of white wine from the cellar of the 'Homme-Armé,' which he arranged under the cushions and which we drank to pass the time on the way.

At midday we arrived at Joigny, which is quite a pretty town. Foreseeing that I should come to the end of my funds before the close of our journey, and not being able to bear the thought of being indebted to Monsieur d'An quetil for my share of the reckoning unless I were reduced thereto by the most extreme need, I resolved to sell a ring and a locket of my mother's that I had by me, and searched the town for a jeweller. I found one in the market-place opposite to the church, who had a shop full of chains and crosses at the sign of 'La Bonne Foi.'

What was my astonishment at finding my good master there, who, standing before the counter, and drawing from a twist of paper five or six small diamonds, which I easily recognized as those that Monsieur d'Astarac had shown us, asked the jeweller what price he thought he could give for the stones!

The jeweller examined them, then looking at the Abbé over his spectacles said:

'Monsieur, these stones would be very valuable if they were real. But they are false and there is no need of the touchstone to be assured of it. They are glass beads, only fit for children's playthings—unless one were to stick them in the crown of some village statue of Our Lady, where they would make a fine effect.'

On hearing this Monsieur Coignard took up his diamonds and turned his back on the jeweller. In doing so

he perceived me and seemed somewhat confused at the meeting. I finished my business in a very short time and, finding my good master in the doorway, I represented to him the wrong he did himself and his companions in making off with stones which, had they been real, might have been his undoing.

'My son,' he replied, 'God in His desire to keep me guiltless has willed that they should be jewels only in appearance and seeming. I confess that I did wrong to go off with them. You see that I am regretting it, and it is a page I should like to tear out of the book of my life, where several leaves, to speak plainly, are not as clean and immaculate as they should be. I feel keenly how reprehensible my behaviour has been in this particular. But man should not be overmuch cast down when he falls into sin; and now is the moment for me to say to myself, as did a famous divine: "Consider your great weakness, which you put to the proof only too often on the slightest occasion, and nevertheless it is for your good that these things or others like unto them happen to you. All is not over for you if you find yourself often afflicted and sorely tempted, and that though you succumb to temptation. You are man and not God; you are human flesh and no angel. How can you always remain in the same virtuous state when this fidelity has failed the very angels in heaven and the first man in paradise?" Such, Jacques, my son, are the only spiritual communions and the real soliloquies which suit my present state of mind. But is it not time, after this unfortunate step over which we will not linger, to return to our inn, and there in company with the post-boys, who are simple folk and easy to get on with, drink one or two bottles of the wine of the place?'

I sided with this view, and we regained the inn, where we found Monsieur d'Anquetil, who had also returned from the town bringing back some cards. He played piquet with my good master and when we were on our way again they continued playing in the carriage. This passion for play, by which my rival was carried away, afforded me some freedom with Jael, who talked more willingly with me now that she was deserted. I found a

bitter pleasure in these talks. Reproaching her with her treachery and her unfaithfulness, I eased my sorrow by complaints, now mild, now harsh.

'Alas, Jael,' said I, 'the memory and the vision of our caresses, which were once my dearest delight, have become but cruel torture to me, through the thought that to-day you are for another what you once were for me.'

She made answer:

'A woman is not the same with every one.'

And when I lengthily prolonged my wailings and reproaches, she said:

'I understand that I have caused you sorrow. But that is no reason why you should overwhelm me a hundred times a day with your useless complaining.'

When Monsieur d'Anquetil lost, his temper became troublesome. He annoyed Jael at every opportunity, who, not being patient, threatened to write to her uncle Mosaïde to come and fetch her away. These quarrels at first afforded me some glimmer of hope and rejoicing, but after they had been renewed several times I saw them arise with anxiety, having recognized the fact that they were followed by impetuous reconciliations which proclaimed themselves to my ears in sudden kisses, whisperings, and lustful sighs. Monsieur d'Anquetil could scarcely endure me. But, on the other hand, he had a lively affection for my good master, who deserved it by his equable and smiling temper and the incomparable elegance of his wit. They played and drank together in a sympathy which grew with every day. With knees close together to support the table on which they laid down their cards, they laughed, joked, and teased one another, and though it sometimes happened that they threw the cards at each other's heads, exchanging abuse that would have brought a blush to the cheeks of the dockmen of the Port Saint-Nicolas or the boatmen of the Mall, and though Monsieur d'Anquetil swore before God, the Virgin, and all the saints that he had never in his life, even at the end of a rope, seen a worse scoundrel than Abbé Coignard, one felt that he dearly loved my good master, and it was amusing to hear him a moment after say laughingly:

'Abbé, you shall be my chaplain and my partner at piquet. You must also hunt with us. We must search the whole of Perche for a horse strong enough to carry you, and you shall have a hunting outfit such as I have seen on the Bishop of Uzès. It is high time, anyway, that you had some new clothes, for, without intending any reproach, Monsieur l'Abbé, your breeches really scarcely cover you at the back.'

Jael also yielded to the irresistible attraction which drew people to my good master. She resolved to repair as well as possible the disorder of his toilet. She pulled one of her dresses to pieces to mend our venerable friend's coat and breeches, and made him a present of a lace handkerchief to make some bands. My good master received these small gifts with graceful dignity. I had occasion to remark it several times: he carried himself gallantly towards women. He showed an interest in them which never became indiscreet, praised them with the insight of a connoisseur, giving them counsel gained in his long experience, shielded them with the infinite indulgence of a heart ready to pardon all weaknesses, and yet neglected no occasion to make them listen to great and useful truths.

Reaching Montbard on the fourth day, we stopped on a height whence we could perceive the whole town, lying in a small compass as if it had been painted on canvas by some clever workman, careful to put in all the details.

'Look upon these walls, these towers, these belfries and roofs, which rise above the verdure,' said my good master. 'They constitute a town, and, without seeking to know its name or its history, it befits us to reflect upon it as one of the most worthy subjects of meditation that can be offered us on the face of the globe. Indeed, a town of any kind affords the mind subject for speculation. The post-boys tell us this is Montbard. The place is unknown to me. Nevertheless, I do not fear to affirm, by analogy, that the people who dwell there, like ourselves, are egoistic, cowardly, treacherous, greedy, and debauched. Otherwise, they would not be men, nor descended from Adam, in whom, being at once miserable and yet worthy of veneration, all our instincts, even down to the very lowest,

have their august source. The only point on which one might hesitate is to know whether those people down there are more disposed to the love of food than to reproduction of their kind. Yet no doubt is permissible: a philosopher will form the sane opinion that hunger, for these unfortunate beings, is a more pressing goad than love. In my salad days, I thought the human animal was inclined above all things to the union of the sexes. But it was a delusion; and it is plain that men are more interested in preserving life than in giving it. Hunger is the axis of humanity: but as it is idle to discuss the matter here I will say, if you wish, that mortal life has two poles, hunger and love. And now is the moment to lend me your ears and your hearts! These savage creatures, who are bent on furiously devouring or embracing one another, live together under laws which hinder them from satisfying this double and deep-seated concupiscence. These ingenuous animals, having become citizens, willingly impose on themselves privations of all kinds, respect the property of others, which is a prodigious thing, considering their greedy nature, and observe a modesty, a common but enormous hypocrisy, consisting in rarely speaking of what they think of continually. For own, in all good faith, messieurs, when we see a woman it is not the beauty of her soul and the qualities of her mind on which our thoughts fix themselves, and in talk with her it is her physical features we have principally in view. And the charming creature knows it so well that, dressed by a clever milliner, she has taken care only to veil her attractions by heightening them with various artifices. And Mademoiselle Jael, who is no savage, would be quite distressed if art in her had the upper hand over nature to such an extent that one could not see the fullness of her bosom and the roundness of her form. So, in whatever way we regard men since the fall of Adam, we see them hungry and incontinent. Whence comes it, then, that gathered together in towns they impose privations of all sorts on themselves and submit to a regimen completely opposed to their corrupt nature? It has been said that they found it to their advantage, and that they felt that

this constraint was the price of their safety. But that is to suppose them too reasonable, and, what is more, using a wrong reasoning, for it is ridiculous to save one's life at the cost of what constitutes its excuse and its value. It has also been said that fear kept them obedient, and it is true that the jail, the gallows, and the wheel successfully ensure obedience to laws. But certain it is that prejudice has gone hand in hand with the laws, and one cannot well see how constraint has been so universally established. One defines laws as the necessary relations of things, but we have just seen that these relations, far from being necessary, are in flat contradiction to nature. Hence, messieurs, I seek the source and origin of laws not in mankind but beyond them, and I believe that being strange to mankind they come from God, who has shaped with His mysterious hands not only the earth and the water, plants and animals, but also nations and societies. I believe that laws emanate straight from Him, from His first decalogue, and that they are inhuman because they are divine. You quite understand that I am considering codes in their underlying principles and essence, without wishing to enter into their laughable diversity and pitiable complications. The details of custom and prescription, both written and spoken, are man's part in it, and this part must be disregarded. But do not let us fear to acknowledge it. The city is a divine institution. From which it results that every government should be a theocracy. A priest noted for the share he took in the Declaration of 1682, Monsieur Bossuet, was not mistaken in wanting to lay down political rules after the maxims of Holy Scripture, and, if he failed miserably, one can only blame the weakness of his genius, which dully clung to examples drawn from the books of Judges and Kings, failing to see that God, when He works in this world, has regard to time and space, and knows how to differentiate between the French and the Israelites. The city, re-established under this, the only true and lawful authority, will not be the city of Joshua, Saul, or David, it will more likely be the city of the Gospel, the city of the poor, where the workman and the prostitute will not be put to shame

by the Pharisee. Oh, messieurs, how well it would be to draw from the Scriptures a more beautiful and sacred policy than that which was painfully extracted by Monsieur Bossuet, so strict and harsh in style. What a city, more harmonious than that which Amphion raised to the sounds of his lyre, shall rise on the teachings of Jesus Christ, the day when His priests, no longer sold to emperors and kings, shall show themselves the true princes of the people!'

While standing round my good master, hearing him discourse in this wise, we were surrounded without our noticing by a troop of beggars, who, limping, shivering, dribbling, waving stumps, shaking goitres, and exposing sores running with poisonous discharge, beset us with their importunate benedictions. They flung themselves greedily on some coins which Monsieur d'Anquetil threw to them, and rolled together in the dust.

'It makes me ill to look at those unfortunate beings,' sighed Jael.

'Your pity sits on you like an ornament, mademoiselle,' said Monsieur Coignard; 'these sighs lend a grace to your bosom by swelling it with a breath we should each of us like to inhale from your lips. But allow me to tell you that this tenderness, which is not the less touching for being selfish, moves your bowels to compassion by the comparison of these poor wretches with yourself, and by the instinctive feeling that your young body touches, so to speak, these hideously ulcerated and mutilated forms, as it is in very truth allied and attached to them in so far as we are all members of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whence it follows that you cannot face the corruption on the flesh of these poor wretches without seeing it at the same time as a presage to your own flesh. And these wretched beings have risen up before you like prophets, proclaiming that the lot of the children of Adam, in this world, is sickness and death. That is why you sighed, mademoiselle.

'As a matter of fact, there is no reason to conclude that these beggars, eaten up with ulcers and vermin, are more unhappy than kings and queens. We must not even say that they are poorer, if, as it appears, the farthing that woman with the goitre has picked up in the dust, dribbling

with joy, seems to her more precious than is a pearl necklace to the mistress of a prince-bishop of Cologne or Salzburg. Properly to understand our spiritual and veritable interests, we ought to envy the existence of that cripple who is crawling towards you on his hands, in preference to that of the King of France or the emperor. Their equal before God, he perchance possesses that peace of the heart which they know not, and the inestimable treasure of innocence. But draw your skirts round you, mademoiselle, for fear of the vermin with which I see he is covered.'

Thus talked my good master, and we never tired of listening to him.

At about three leagues from Montbard, one of the traces having broken and the post-boys lacking the cord wherewith to mend it, as that part of the world is far from all habitation, we remained there in a distressed condition. My good master and Monsieur d'Anquetil killed the boredom of this enforced halt by playing cards with that sympathy in their quarrels now become a habit with them. While the young gentleman showed his astonishment that his partner turned up the king more often than consorted with the law of probabilities, Jael drew me aside and somewhat agitatedly asked me if I did not see a carriage stopping behind us at a winding in the road. Looking at the spot she indicated, I saw indeed an antiquated calèche of a ridiculous and odd shape.

'That carriage,' added Jael, 'stopped when we did. So it must have been following us. I wish I could make out the faces of those who are travelling in that concern. I am anxious about it. Is it not covered with a tall narrow hood? It is like the carriage my uncle took me in to Paris when I was quite small, after he had killed the Portuguese. As far as I know, it was left in a stable at the château of Les Sablons. This one exactly reminds me of it, and a horrible memory it is, for I last saw my uncle in it foaming with rage. You cannot imagine, Jacques, how violent he is. I experienced his rage the very day of my departure. He shut me up in my room, vomiting forth frightful abuse against Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard. I shudder when I think of the state he must have been in

when he found my room empty, and my sheets still fastened to the window whence I escaped to meet and fly with you.'

'You mean to say with Monsieur d'Anquetil, Jael.'

'How punctilious you are! Did we not all leave together? But that calèche makes me anxious, it is so like my uncle's.'

'Rest assured, Jael, that it is some worthy Burgundian's carriage who is going about his business with no thought of us.'

'You know nothing about it,' said Jael. 'I am afraid.'

'You surely cannot be afraid that your uncle, decrepit as he has become, will scour the country in pursuit of you, mademoiselle. He is occupied with the cabbala and his Hebrew speculations.'

'You do not know him,' she made reply with a sigh. 'He is entirely taken up with me. He loves me as much as he execrates the rest of the world. He loves me in a way——'

'In what way?'

'In all ways. . . . In short, he loves me.'

'Jael, I shudder to hear you. Good heavens! This Mosaïde loves you without that disinterestedness which is so admirable in an old man and so befitting an uncle. Tell me everything, Jael!'

'Oh, you can put it into words better than I, Jacques.'

'I am stupefied. At his age—is it possible?'

'My friend, you have a white skin and a soul to match it. Everything astonishes you. 'Tis this candour that is your charm. You are deceived with very little trouble. You believe that Mosaïde is a hundred and thirty years old, when he is not much more than sixty, that he lived in the Great Pyramid, when in reality he was a banker at Lisbon. And had I chosen I could have passed in your eyes for a salamander.'

'What, Jael, are you speaking the truth? Your uncle——'

'Yes, and it is the secret of his jealousy. He believes Abbé Coignard to be his rival. He hated him instinctively at first sight. But it is quite another matter now when,

having overheard several words of the interview the good Abbé had with me among the thorn-bushes, he may hate him as the cause of my flight and elopement. For, indeed, I was carried off, my friend, and that should put a certain value on me in your eyes. Oh, I was very ungrateful to leave such a good uncle. But I could not endure the slavery in which he kept me any longer. And, then, I had an ardent desire to grow rich; it is very natural, is it not, to want nice things when one is young and pretty? We have but one life and that a short one. I have been taught no beautiful lies about the immortality of the soul.'

'Alas, Jael,' I exclaimed in an ardour of love which lent me hardihood, 'I lacked nothing when I was near you at Les Sablons; what did you lack to be happy?'

She signed to me that Monsieur d'Anquetil was observing us. The trace was mended and the berlin rolled on between the vine-covered slopes.

We stopped at Nuits to sup and sleep the night. My good master drank half a dozen bottles of the native wine, which marvellously heightened his eloquence. Monsieur d'Anquetil made a good second, glass in hand, but as to coping with him in conversation, the gentleman was quite incapable of that.

The cheer had been good; the lodging was bad. Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard slept in the low room under the stairs, on a feather bed which he shared with the innkeeper and his wife and where they were all three nearly suffocated. Monsieur d'Anquetil took the upper room with Jael, where the bacon and onions hung from the rafters. I climbed up to the loft by a ladder and lay down on the straw. My first deep sleep over, the rays of the moon, whose light came through the cracks in the roof, slipped under my eyelids and opened them in time for me to see Jael in her nightcap coming through the trapdoor. At the cry I gave she put her finger on her lips.

'Hush!' she said. 'Maurice is drunk as a porter or a lord. He sleeps the sleep of Noah down below.'

'Maurice, who is he?' I asked, rubbing my eyes.

'Anquetil. Who else should it be?'

'No one. But I did not know that he was called Maurice.'

'I have not known it long myself. But that is no matter.'

'You are right, Jael. That is of no consequence.'

She was in her chemise, and the moonlight lay like milk upon her naked shoulders. She glided to my side, calling me the tenderest and again the coarsest of names, which slid from her lips in soft murmurings. Then she spoke no more and began to give me kisses as only she knew how and in comparison with which the caresses of other women were insipid.

The restraint and the silence augmented the high tension of my nerves. Surprise, the pleasure of revenge, and, maybe, a perverse jealousy, all added flame to my desires. The elasticity of her body and the supple strength of her movements asked, promised, and deserved the most ardent of caresses. We knew, that night, those deeps of pleasure that border upon pain.

On going down to the courtyard of the hostelry next morning, I found Monsieur d'Anquetil there, who seemed less odious to me now that I had deceived him.

On his side, he seemed more drawn to me than he had been since the beginning of our journey. He spoke to me with familiarity, sympathy, and trustfulness, he reproached me with showing Jael so little consideration and gallantry, and with not paying her those attentions which a good man should pay to every woman.

'She complains,' he said, 'of your incivility. Take note of it, my dear Tournebroche; I should be sorry if there were any unpleasantness between her and you. She is a pretty girl and exceedingly fond of me.'

The berlin had been on its way an hour when Jael, having put her head out of the window, said:

'The calèche has turned up again. I would much like to see the faces of the two men in it. But I cannot succeed.'

I replied that such a long way off, and in the early morning mist, we could distinguish nothing.

She made reply that her sight was so keen that she could distinguish them well, notwithstanding the mist and the distance, were they really faces.

'But,' added she, 'they are not faces.'

'What do you think they are, then?' I asked, with a burst of laughter.

In her turn, she asked me what absurd idea had entered my mind that I should laugh in such a stupid fashion, and said:

'They are not faces, they are masks. Those two men are following us and they are masked.'

I warned Monsieur d'Anquetil that it appeared we were being pursued by a wretched calèche. But he begged me to leave him in peace.

'If a hundred thousand devils were at our heels, I should not trouble myself,' he exclaimed, 'having plenty to do in keeping a watch on this fat hang-dog rascal of an Abbé, who forces the cards in an underhand way and steals all my money. I should not even be astonished if, in thrusting that wretched calèche on me in the middle of my game, you were in league with this old cheat. Cannot a carriage travel on the road without causing you emotion?'

Jael whispered low in my ear:

'Jacques, I foresee that calèche will bring us some evil. I have a presentiment and my presentiments are never wrong.'

'Do you want to make me believe you have the gift of prophecy?'

She gravely answered:

'Indeed I have.'

'What, you a prophetess!' I exclaimed, smiling. 'How strange!'

'You are laughing at me,' she said, 'and you doubt it because you have never seen a prophetess so close before. How would you have her look?'

'I thought they had to be virgins.'

'That is not at all necessary,' she replied with assurance.

The hostile calèche was lost to sight behind a turning in the road. But Jael's anxiety had affected Monsieur d'Anquetil who, without his confessing it, gave orders to the post-boys to increase their speed, promising to pay them good money.

With an excess of solicitude, he handed each of them one of the bottles that the Abbé had kept in reserve at the back of the carriage.

The postilions communicated to their horses the ardour they drew from the wine.

'You may make your mind easy, Jael,' he said, 'at the rate we are going that ancient calèche drawn by the horses of the Apocalypse will not catch us up.'

'We are going like a cat on hot bricks,' said the Abbé.

'If only it lasts!' said Jael.

On our right we saw the vine rows planted at intervals fly by on the slopes. On the left, the Saône flowed sluggishly. We passed the bridge of Tournus like a whirlwind. On the other side of the river rose the town on a hill crowned with the walls of an abbey strong as a fortress.

'That,' said the Abbé, 'is one of the innumerable Benedictine abbeys which are spangled like jewels on the robe of Christian Gaul. Had it pleased God that my destiny had accorded with my character, my life would have slipped by, obscure, easy, and joyful, in one of those houses. There is no Order for doctrine and way of life I hold equal to the Benedictine. They possess admirable libraries. Happy is he who wears their habit and follows their holy rule! Either from the discomfort I feel at present in being so rudely shaken in this carriage, which will not fail to upset shortly in one of the many ruts in which this road is so deeply worn, or more likely as the result of my time of life, which inclines to retirement and serious thought, I long more ardently than ever to seat myself at a table in some old library, where numerous and choice books are gathered together, in silence. I prefer their conversation to that of man, and my dearest wish is to await, while busied with intellectual work, the hour when God will withdraw me from this world. I would write histories, preferably that of the Romans in the decline of the republic. For it is full of instruction and great deeds. I would divide my zeal between Cicero, St John Chrysostom, and Boëthius, and my life passed thus mod-

estly and fruitfully would be like unto the garden of the old man of Tarentum.

'I have tried various ways of living, and I judge that the best of all is, while giving oneself up to study, to look on in peace at the changes in mankind, and to prolong by the contemplation of centuries and empires the briefness of our days. But sequence and continuity are necessary. They have been more wanting than anything in my life. If, as I hope to do, I succeed in recovering from this present false step, I shall endeavour to find an honourable and safe retreat in some learned abbey, where letters flourish and are held in honour. I already see myself there, tasting the renowned peace of knowledge. Could I but count on this good turn from the helpful sylphs of whom that old madman d'Astarac speaks and who appear, it is said, when they are invoked by the cabbalistic name of AGLA——'

At the moment my good master pronounced this word, a sudden shock overwhelmed us all four under a hail of glass, in such confusion that I found myself suddenly blinded and suffocated beneath Jael's skirts, while Monsieur Coignard, in a stifled voice, denounced Monsieur d'Anquetil's sword for having broken all the teeth he had left and, above my head, Jael gave vent to cries which rent the air of the valleys of Burgundy. Meanwhile Monsieur d'Anquetil was promising the postilions to have them hanged. By the time I succeeded in freeing myself he had already jumped through a broken window; we followed him by the same way, my good master and I, and then we all three drew Jael from the overturned carriage. She was unhurt and her first care was to readjust her hair.

'Thank heaven,' said my good master, 'I have escaped with the loss of a tooth, and one neither perfect nor white at that. Time, by its attack, had prepared it for its fall.'

Monsieur d'Anquetil, with legs wide apart and hands on his hips, was examining the overturned carriage.

'The rogues have made it in a pretty state,' said he. 'If we get the horses up, it will fall in the gutter. Abbé, it is good for nothing but to play spillikins with.'

The horses, fallen one over another, kicked each other with their hoofs. In a confused heap of cruppers, manes, flanks, and steaming bellies, one of the postilions was buried, boots in air. The other was spitting blood in the ditch where he had been flung. And Monsieur d'Anquetil shouted at them:

'Fools! I do not know what keeps me from running my sword through your bodies!'

'Monsieur,' said the Abbé, 'would it not first be better to drag that poor man from amidst the horses where he is buried?'

We all set to work and, when the horses were unharnessed and got up, we knew the extent of the damage. There was a spring smashed, a wheel broken, and one horse lamed.

'Fetch a wheelwright,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil to the postilions, 'and let all be made ready within an hour!'

'There is no wheelwright here,' said the postilions.

'A farrier.'

'There is no farrier.'

'A saddler.'

'There is no saddler.'

We looked round us. In the setting sun, the vine-covered slopes stretched in long peaceful lines to the horizon. On the height, smoke rose from a roof near a belfry. On the other side, the Saône, veiled in light mist, was gently effacing the ripple made by a boat which had just passed. The shadows of the poplars were lengthening on the bank. The sharp cry of a bird pierced the vast silence.

'Where are we?' asked Monsieur d'Anquetil.

'Two good leagues from Tournus,' replied the postilion who had fallen in the ditch, spitting blood as he did so, 'and at least four from Mâcon.' And raising his arm towards the roof smoking on the hill: 'That village up there must be Vallars. Its resources are small.'

'God's thunder rend you!' said Monsieur d'Anquetil.

While the horses, huddled together, nibbled at each other's necks, we drew near the carriage lying sorrily on its side. The little postilion, who had been drawn from under the horses, said:

'As for the spring, that could be remedied by a strong piece of wood fitted to the brace. The carriage would only be slightly more shaky. But there is the broken wheel! And the worst of it is my hat is underneath it.'

'Damn your hat,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil.

'Your excellency does not perhaps know it was quite new,' said the little postilion.

'And the broken windows!' sighed Jael, sitting on her portmanteau at the side of the road.

'If it were only the windows,' said my good master, 'we could fill their places by lowering the blinds, but the bottles must be in exactly the same state as the windows. That is what I must make sure of as soon as the berlin is right side up. I am equally troubled about my Boëthius, which I left under the cushions with several other good works.'

'They matter nothing,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'I have got the cards in my waistcoat pocket. But are we not going to sup?'

'I was thinking of that,' said the Abbé. 'It is not in vain that God has given man, for his use, the animals which people the earth, sky, and water. I am an excellent angler, the careful watch for fish particularly suits my meditative spirit, and the Orne has seen me holding the insidious line and pondering the eternal verities. Have no fear about your supper. If Mademoiselle Jael will kindly give me one of the pins which support her attire, I will soon make a hook of it, with which to fish in the river, and I flatter myself that I shall bring you back two or three small carp before nightfall, which we will grill over a fire of brushwood.'

'I clearly perceive,' said Jael, 'that we are reduced to a savage state. But I cannot give you a pin, Abbé, unless you give me something in exchange, otherwise our friendship runs the risk of being broken. And I do not want that to occur.'

'Then I will make an advantageous bargain,' said my good master. 'I will pay for your pin with a kiss, mademoiselle.'

Thereupon, taking the pin, he put his lips to Jael's cheek in an indescribably charming, graceful, and becoming manner.

After wasting a good deal of time, we decided on the most sensible method. The tall postilion, who spat blood no longer, was sent to Tournus with a horse to bring back a wheelwright, while his fellow lighted a fire in a sheltered spot, for the air was becoming chilly and the wind was rising.

We perceived on the road, a hundred paces beyond the scene of our downfall, a hill of soft stone whose base was hollowed in places. In one of these hollows we decided to await the return of the postilion sent as a messenger to Tournus, warming ourselves meanwhile. The second postilion tied the three remaining horses, one of which was lamed, to the trunk of a tree, near our cave. The Abbé, who had succeeded in making a rod with some branches of willow, a string, a cork, and a pin, went off to angle, inclined thereto as much by his philosophic and meditative turn as by the design of bringing us back some fish. Monsieur d'Anquetil, remaining with Jael and me in the grotto, proposed a game of ombre, which three can play at, and which, being Spanish, he said, was suitable to such adventurous people as we were for the time being. And in truth, in this stone-pit, at nightfall, on a deserted road, our little party would not have seemed unworthy to figure in one of those encounters of Don Quigeot or Don Quixote which amuse the servant girls. So we played at ombre. It is a game which needs to be taken seriously. I made many mistakes and my impatient partner began to be angry, when the fine and smiling countenance of my good master appeared before us in the firelight. Untying his handkerchief, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard took out four or five small fish, which he cut open with his knife ornamented with the image of the late king as a Roman emperor on a triumphal column, and which he gutted as easily as if he had never lived anywhere but among the fishwives in the market, so much did he excel in the smallest undertakings as in the greatest. While he arranged this small fry over the ashes he said:

'I will confide to you that, following the river on its downward course, looking for a favourable bank whence to fish, I perceived the apocalyptic calèche which strikes terror into the heart of Mademoiselle Jael. It had stopped at some distance behind our berlin. You must have seen it pass by here while I was fishing in the river, and it must have brought consolation to the mind of mademoiselle here.'

'We did not see it,' said Jael.

'Then it must have started off again, when night had already fallen; and at least you must have heard it.'

'We have not heard it,' said Jael.

'Then this night must be both blind and deaf. For it is scarcely believable that that calèche, with neither a broken wheel nor a lame horse, should have stayed on the road. What could it do there?'

'Yes, what could it do there?' said Jael.

'This supper,' said my good master, 'by its simplicity, recalls those repasts in the Bible, where the pious traveller shared fish from the Tigris with an angel on the river bank. But we need bread, salt, and wine. I will try to get the provisions out of the berlin where they are shut up, and see if by chance a bottle has not been preserved intact. For there are times when glass will not break under a blow which would shatter steel. Tournebroche, my son, please give me your flint and steel; and you, mademoiselle, do not fail to turn the fish. I will return immediately.'

He went off, his somewhat heavy step died away slowly on the road, and soon we heard nothing more.

'This night,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'reminds me of the one which preceded the battle of Parma. For you are not ignorant of the fact that I served under Villars and fought in the War of Succession. I was among the scouts. We saw nothing. That is one of the artifices of war. They send men to reconnoitre the enemy who come back without having seen or heard anything. But they make reports out of it after the battle, and that is where the tacticians triumph. Well, then, at nine o'clock in the evening I was sent out as a scout with twelve troopers . . .'

And he told us of the War of Succession, and of his

love-passages in Italy; his recital lasted fully a quarter of an hour, after which he exclaimed:

'That rascal of an Abbé does not come back. I wager he is drinking all the wine left in the boot at the back.

Thinking then that my good master might be somewhat hampered, I got up to go to his aid. The night was moonless, and while the sky glittered with stars the earth remained in such darkness that my eyes, dazzled by the light of the fire, could not penetrate it.

Having gone but fifty steps on the road, which was faint in the darkness, I heard in front of me a terrible cry, which did not seem to issue from a human breast, a cry different from all the cries I had heard before, and which struck me dumb with horror. I ran in the direction whence came this shriek of mortal distress. But fear and the darkness stayed my steps. Arrived at length at the spot where the carriage lay shapeless and magnified by the dark, I found my good master seated by the edge of the ditch, doubled in two. I could not distinguish his face. I asked him tremblingly:

'What is the matter with you? Why did you cry out?'

'Yes, why did I cry out?' he said in a changed voice, a voice new to me. 'I did not know that I cried out. Tournebroche, have you not seen a man? He knocked against me rather roughly in the dark. He gave me a blow with his fist.'

'Come, my good master, raise yourself,' I said.

Having raised himself up, he fell back heavily.

I struggled to lift him up, and my hands were wet as I touched his breast.

'You are bleeding!'

'I am bleeding? I am a dead man. He has murdered me. I thought at first it was but a very hard blow. But it is a wound from which I feel I shall never recover.'

'Who has struck you, my good master?'

'It was the Jew. I did not see him, but I know it was he. How do I know it was he when I never saw him? Yes, how comes that? What strange happenings! It is unbelievable, is it not, Tournebroche? I have in my mouth the taste of death which cannot be defined. It had to

be, my God! But why here rather than there? There lies the mystery! Adjutorium nostrum in nomine Domini. . . . Domine, exandi oraitonem meam. . . .'

He prayed for some time in a low voice, and then he said:

'Tournebroche, my son, take the two bottles which I took out and put opposite. I am exhausted. Tournebroche, where do you think the wound is? It is in the back I suffer the most, and it seems to me that my life is ebbing away. My mind is going.'

Murmuring these words, he quietly fainted away in my arms. I tried to lift him up, but I had only strength to lay him down on the road. His shirt opened, I found the wound; it was in the chest, small and bleeding but little. I tore up my ruffles and applied the strips to the wound. I called out, I cried for help. Soon I thought I heard them coming to my assistance from the direction of Tournus, and I recognized Monsieur d'Astarac. Unexpected as was this meeting, I was not even surprised at it, overwhelmed as I was by the grief of thus holding the best of masters dying in my arms.

'What means this, my son?' demanded the alchemist.

'Come to my help, monsieur,' I replied, 'Abbé Coignard is dying. Mosaïde has murdered him.'

'It is true,' said Monsieur d'Astarac, 'that Mosaïde came here in an old calèche in pursuit of his niece, and I accompanied him to exhort you, my son, to resume your work in my house. Since yesterday we have pressed hard upon your berlin, which we saw a short time ago fall into a ditch. At that moment Mosaïde got out of the carriage, and, whether he went for a walk or whether, what is more likely still, he made himself invisible, as he has the power to do, I have not seen him since. It is possible he has already shown himself to his niece to curse her; for such was his design. But he has not murdered Abbé Coignard. It is the elves, my son, who have killed your master, to punish him for having revealed their secrets. Nothing is more certain.'

'Ah, monsieur,' I exclaimed, 'what matters whether it be the Jew or the elves; we must succour him.'

'My son, on the contrary, it matters very much,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac. 'For if he had been struck by a human hand it would be very easy for me to heal him by a magical operation; but whereas he has drawn on himself the enmity of the elves he cannot escape their certain vengeance.'

As he spoke these last words, Monsieur d'Anquetil and Jael, attracted by my cries, came up with the postilion bearing a lantern.

'What,' said Jael, 'is Monsieur Coignard ill?'

And, kneeling down by my good master's side, she raised his head and made him inhale her salts.

'Mademoiselle,' I said, 'you are the cause of his undoing. His death is the vengeance for your elopement. It is Mosaïde who has killed him.'

She lifted her face over my good master, pale with horror and glistening with tears.

'Do you suppose, then, it is so easy to be a pretty girl without causing unhappiness?' she asked.

'Alas,' I replied, 'what you say is only too true. But we have lost the best of men.'

At this moment Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard gave a deep sigh, turned up the whites of his eyes, asked for his copy of Boëthius, and fell unconscious again.

The postilion was of opinion we should bear the wounded man to the village of Vallars, situated half a league away on the hill.

'I will fetch the quietest of the three horses which remain to us,' he said. 'We will fasten the poor man safely on, and take him at a slow pace. I think he is very ill. He has just the look of a courier who was assassinated at Michaelmas, on the road four posts from here, near Senecy, where my intended lives. The poor devil blinked his eyelids and turned up the whites of his eyes like a hussy, with all respect to you, messieurs. And your Abbé did likewise when mademoiselle tickled his nose with the salts. It is a bad sign for the wounded; as to the girls, they do not die for turning up their eyes in such fashion. Your excellencies know that well. And it is a far cry, the Lord be praised, from the thrills of love

to the rigors of death. But it is the same turn of the eye. Stay here, messieurs, I will go and fetch the horse.'

'The rustic is amusing,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil, 'with his turned-up eyes and his die-away lady. In Italy I have seen soldiers die with a fixed stare and their eyes starting out of their head. There is no law about dying of a wound, even among soldiers, where exactitude is pushed as far as it will go. But have the goodness, Tournebroche, in default of someone better qualified, to present me to this black-clad gentleman who wears diamond buttons on his coat, and whom I divine to be Monsieur d'Astarac.'

'Ah, monsieur,' I replied, 'take it as done. I have no care for anything but to help my good master.'

'So be it,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil. And approaching Monsieur d'Astarac he said: 'Monsieur, I have taken your mistress from you. I am ready to give you satisfaction.'

'Monsieur,' replied Monsieur d'Astarac, 'thanks be to heaven, I have no connection with any woman, and I do not know what you mean by speaking thus.'

At this moment the postilion returned with a horse. My good master had regained consciousness a little. We all four raised him up, and with great difficulty we succeeded in placing him on the horse, on which we fastened him. Then we set out. I supported him on one side, Monsieur d'Anquetil on the other. The postilion held the bridle and carried the lantern. Jael followed us, crying. Monsieur d'Astarac had regained his calèche. We advanced carefully. All went well while we kept to the road. But when we had to climb the steep path between the vines, my good master, slipping with every movement of the horse, lost the small amount of strength remaining to him and fainted away once more. We judged it expedient to take him off his horse and to carry him in our arms. The postilion held him by the armpits and I carried his feet. The ascent was steep, and I thought several times I should sink down under my living cross on the stones of the path. At length the hill became easier. We threaded our way through a little path bordered with hedges, which twisted up the hill-side, and soon

we perceived on our left the first roofs of Vallars. At the sight we put down our dismal burden and stopped a moment to take breath. Then, taking up our load again, we pushed on as far as the village.

A rosy light showed in the east above the horizon. The morning star in the paling heavens shone as white and peaceful as the moon, whose slim crescent paled in the west. The birds began to sing; my good master heaved a sigh.

Jael ran before us, knocking at the doors in quest of a bed and a surgeon. Laden with baskets and hampers, the vine-growers were going to the vintage. One of them told Jael that Gaulard, in the square, had lodging for travellers whether on horse or on foot.

'As to the surgeon, Coquebert,' he added, 'you see him over there under the barber's basin which serves him as a sign. He is leaving his house to go to his vineyard.'

He was a little man, very civil. He told us that since his daughter had married a short time ago he had a bed in his house which would take the wounded man.

At his command, his wife, a fat woman with a white cap surmounted by a felt hat, put sheets on the bed in the ground-floor room. She helped us to undress Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard and to put him to bed. Then she went off to find the priest.

Meanwhile, Monsieur Coquebert examined the wound.

'You see,' I said, 'it is but small and bleeds only a little.'

'That is not a good sign and does not please me at all, my young monsieur. I like a big wound that bleeds.'

'I see that for a sawbones and a village barber you have not bad taste,' said Monsieur d'Anquetil. 'Nothing is worse than these small, deep wounds which look like mere nothings. Give me a fine gash in the face. That is pleasant to look at and heals immediately. But you must know, my good fellow, that this wounded man is my chaplain and my partner at piquet. Are you the man to put him on his feet again, in spite of your face, which is rather that of a giver of clysters?'

'At your service,' replied the surgeon-barber, bowing. 'But I also set broken bones and I dress wounds. I will examine this one.'

'Be quick about it, monsieur,' said I.

'Patience!' he said. 'First we must wash it, and I am waiting till the water is hot in the kettle.'

My good master, who had revived a little, said slowly in quite a strong voice:

'Lamp in hand he will visit all the corners of Jerusalem, and that which was hidden in darkness shall be brought forth to daylight.'

'What are you saying, my good master?'

'Leave me alone, my son,' he replied, 'I am occupied with thoughts suitable to my condition.'

'The water is hot,' said the barber. 'Hold this basin close to the bed. I am going to wash the wound.'

While he was passing a sponge filled with warm water over my good master's chest, the priest entered the room with Madame Coquebert. He held in his hand a basket and shears.

'Here is the poor man, then,' he said. 'I was going to my vines, but one must tend those of Jesus Christ first of all. My son,' he added, drawing near him, 'offer up your affliction to our Saviour. Maybe it is not so serious as you think. After all, we must comply with the will of God.' Then turning to the barber he asked: 'Monsieur Coquebert, is it a very urgent case, and can I go to my vineyard? The white grapes can wait, it does no harm if they are over-ripe, and even a little rain will but render the wine better and more abundant. But the red should be picked immediately.'

'You say true, Monsieur le Curé,' replied Coquebert, 'I have grapes in my vineyard which are all covered with mildew and which have escaped the heat of the sun only to perish in the rain.'

'Alas,' said the priest, 'damp and dryness are the vine-grower's two enemies.'

'Nothing is truer,' said the barber, 'but I must probe the wound.' So saying he plunged his finger into the wound.

'Ah, torturer!' exclaimed the patient.

'Remember,' said the priest, 'that the Saviour forgave His executioners.'

'They were not barbers,' said the Abbé.'

'That is wickedly said,' said the priest.

'You must not chide a dying man for his pleasantries,' said my good master. 'But I suffer cruelly: this man has murdered me and I die a second time. First it was at the hands of a Jew.'

'What does he mean?' asked the priest.

'The best thing, Monsieur le Curé, is not to trouble oneself,' said the barber. 'One should never wish to understand the speeches of the sick. They are but ravings.'

'Coquebert,' said the priest, 'you do not speak rightly. One must listen to the sick in confession, and some Christian who has said nothing good in his life may finish by pronouncing the words which shall open paradise to him.'

'I only speak of things temporal,' said the barber.

'Monsieur le Curé,' said I in my turn, 'my good master, Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard, is not delirious, and it is only too true that he has been assassinated by a Jew, named Mosaïde.'

'In that case,' replied the priest, 'he should see God's special favour therein, who willed that he should perish by the hand of a descendant of those who crucified His Son. The ways of Providence in this world are always admirable. Monsieur Coquebert, may I go to my vineyard?'

'You may go, Monsieur le Curé,' replied the barber. 'The wound is no light one, but it is not the kind of which one dies at once. It is, Monsieur le Curé, one of those wounds which play with the sick person like a cat with a mouse, and at that game we may gain some time.'

'That is well,' said Monsieur le Curé. 'Let us thank God, my son, for what life He has left you, but it is precarious and transitory. One must always be ready to leave it.'

My good master gravely made reply:

'Exist on this earth as not existing, possess without possessing, for the image of this world passes.'

Taking up his basket and his shears Monsieur le Curé said:

'Judging from your speech, my son, even more than from your coat and your breeches that I see spread on that stool,

I know that you belong to the Church and lead a holy life. Have you taken holy orders?'

'He is a priest,' I said, 'doctor of theology and professor of eloquence.'

'In what diocese?' asked the Curé.

'Of Séez, in Normandy, suffragan to Rouen.'

'A notable ecclesiastical province,' said Monsieur le Curé, 'but which yields much in antiquity and celebrity to the diocese of Rheims, of which I am a priest.' And he went out.

Monsieur Jérôme Coignard passed the day peacefully. Jael wished to stay the night with the sick man. Towards eleven o'clock in the evening, I left Monsieur Coquebert's house and sought a lodging at the inn of the worthy Gaulard. I found Monsieur d'Astarac in the square, and his shadow in the moonlight stretched nearly across its whole expanse. He put his hand on my shoulder as was his habit and said with his accustomed gravity:

'It is time that I reassured you, my son; I merely accompanied Mosaïde for that reason. I see you have been cruelly tormented by goblins. These little spirits of the earth have assailed you, deceived you by all sorts of phantasmagorias, seduced you by a thousand lies, and finally driven you to flee my house.'

'Alas, monsieur,' I replied, 'it is true I left your roof with an apparent ingratitude for which I ask your pardon. But I was pursued by the police sergeants, not by goblins. And my good master has been assassinated. That is no phantasmagoria.'

'You may be certain of it,' replied the great man, 'the unfortunate Abbé has been mortally struck by the sylphs whose secrets he had revealed. He took from a cupboard some stones which are the handiwork of the sylphs, and which they had left in an imperfect state, differing greatly in brilliancy and pureness from the diamond.

'It is this greed and the name of "Agla" indiscreetly pronounced which has vexed them the most. Now understand, my son, it is impossible for philosophers to arrest the vengeance of these irascible people. I learnt by a supernatural channel, and also from Crito's report,

the sacrilegious larceny of Monsieur Coignard, who insolently plumed himself on surprising the art by which salamanders, sylphs, and gnomes ripen the morning dew and insensibly transform it into crystal and diamond.'

'Alas, monsieur, I assure you he never thought of doing so, and that it was that horrible Mosaïde who struck him down with a dagger on the road.'

This speech extremely displeased Monsieur d'Astarac, who begged me in a manner not to be denied to talk no more in such fashion.

'Mosaïde,' he added, 'is a good enough cabbalist to reach his enemies without running after them. Know, my son, that, had he wished to kill Monsieur Coignard, he could have done it easily from his room, by the operation of magic. I see that you are still ignorant of the first elements of the science. The truth is that this learned man, informed by the faithful Crito of his niece's flight, took post to regain her, and, if need were, to bring her back to his house. Which is what he would certainly have done, had he but discerned in the unhappy creature's soul some gleam of repentance and regret. But, seeing her quite corrupted by debauch, he preferred to excommunicate and curse her by the Globes, the Wheels, and the Beasts of Elisha. That is precisely what he has just done, before my eyes, in the calèche where he is quartered apart, so as not to share the bed and the board of Christians.'

I was silent, amazed at such maunderings, but this extraordinary man spoke with such eloquence that it did not leave me untroubled.

'Why,' said he, 'will you not allow yourself to be enlightened by the advice of a philosopher? What wisdom can you oppose to him, my son? Consider that yours is less in quantity, without differing in essence. To you, as to me, nature appears as an infinite multitude of images, which one must recognize and classify, and which form a sequence of hieroglyphics. You can easily distinguish many of these signs to which you attach a meaning, but you are too inclined to content yourself with a common and literal one, and do not sufficiently seek the ideal and the symbolical. Nevertheless, the world is only con-

ceivable as a symbol, and all that is seen in the universe is but pictured writing, which the common herd spell out without understanding. Beware, my son, of mumbling and braying in this universal tongue, like the savants who fill the academies. But rather receive at my hand the key of all knowledge.'

He stopped for a moment and continued his speech in a more familiar tone:

'You are pursued, my dear son, by foes less terrible than the sylphs. And your salamander will have no trouble of ridding you of the goblins as soon as you ask her to do so. I repeat, that I only came here with Mosaïde to give you this good advice and to press you to return to me and continue your work. I understand that you wish to be with your unfortunate master until the end. I give you full permission. But do not fail to return hereafter to my house. Farewell! I return to Paris this night with the great Mosaïde, whom you have so unjustly suspected.'

I promised him all he wished, and dragged myself as far as my wretched bed in the inn, on which I fell, overwhelmed with sorrow and fatigue.

XIX

The following day, at early dawn, I returned to the surgeon's, and there I found Jael by my good master's bedside, sitting up straight on her straw-bottomed chair, her head enveloped in her black mantle, attentive, serious, and docile as a sister of charity. Monsieur Coignard, very red in the face, was dozing.

'He has not had a good night,' she said in a low voice. 'He wandered, he sang, he called me Sister Germaine, and made advances to me. I am not offended at that, but it shows how upset he is.'

'Alas,' I explained, 'if you had not betrayed me, Jael, and scoured the country with that fine gentleman, my good master would not lie on this bed with his breast pierced.'

'It is just our friend's misfortune,' she replied, 'which causes my consuming regret. But as for the rest it is not worth a thought, and I cannot conceive, Jacques, how you can dwell on it at such a moment.'

'The thought is always with me,' I answered.

'I,' she said, 'never think of it at all. You yourself provide more than three-quarters of your unhappiness.'

'What do you mean by that, Jael?'

'I mean, my friend, that if I supply the stuff you apply the embroidery, and that your imagination enriches the simple reality far too much. I swear to you at this present hour that I do not myself remember the quarter of what causes you sorrow, and you ponder so obstinately on this subject that your rival is more present to you than to myself. Think no more of it, and let me give this cooling drink to the Abbé, who is just waking up.'

At this moment Monsieur Coquebert approached the bed with his surgical case, dressed the wound afresh, and said out loud that it was well on the road to healing. Then, drawing me aside, he said:

'I can assure you, monsieur, this good Abbé will not die from the blow he has received. But, truth to tell, I much fear he will not get over a rather bad attack of pleurisy occasioned by his wound. Just now he is in a condition of high fever. But here comes Monsieur le Curé.'

My good master recognized him quite well and asked politely how he did.

'Better than the vine,' replied the priest. 'For it is quite spoilt with blight and maggots notwithstanding that the clergy of Dijon held a fine procession against them this year, with cross and banners. But we must have a finer one next year and burn more wax lights. It will also be necessary for the ecclesiastical court to excommunicate afresh the flies which destroy the grapes.'

'Monsieur le Curé,' said my good master, 'they say that you wanton with the girls among the vines. Fie! That is not fitting at your age. In my youth I was, like you, fond of the sex. But years have improved me, and latterly I let a nun pass without speaking to her. You treat

damsels and bottles in another fashion, Monsieur le Curé. But you do worse still in not saying masses for which you are paid, and in trafficking in the goods of the Church. You are a bigamist and a simonac.'

On hearing these words Monsieur le Curé was sadly surprised; his mouth remained open, and his chaps fell mournfully on either side of his big face.

'What an unworthy insult to the character I bear!' he sighed at last, his eyes on the ceiling. 'What a way he talks so near to the judgment seat of God. Oh, Monsieur l'Abbé, is it for you to talk in such fashion, you who have led such a holy life, and have studied so many books?'

My good master raised himself on his elbow. Fever gave him back, in melancholy and unnatural fashion, the jovial air we had loved to see with him.

'It is true,' he said, 'that I have studied the ancient writers. But I am far from being as well read as was the second curate of the Bishop of Séez. Although he looked a donkey, and was one, he was a greater reader than I. For he was cross-eyed, and looking askew he read two pages at a time. What do you say to that, you old rascal of a priest, you old gallant who run after wenches in the moonlight? Priest, your lady-love looks like a witch. She has a beard on her chin, she is the surgeon-barber's wife. He is a complete cuckold and it serves the homunculus right, whose whole medical knowledge reaches no further than the giving of a clyster.'

'Lord God, what is he saying?' exclaimed Madame Coquebert. 'He must have the devil in him.'

'I have heard many sick people talk in delirium,' said Monsieur Coquebert, 'but not one of them talked so wickedly.'

'I perceive,' continued the priest, 'that we shall have more difficulty than I thought in bringing this sick man to a good end. He is of a more bitter humour and has more impurity in his disposition that I had at first remarked. His speeches are unseemly in an ecclesiastic and a sick person.'

'It is the effect of the fever,' said the surgeon-barber.

'But,' went on the priest, 'this fever, if it does not go

down, may lead him to hell. He has just seriously failed in what is owing to a priest. I shall, nevertheless, return to-morrow to exhort him, for I owe him, by the example of our Lord, infinite pity. But on this score I feel a lively anxiety. Ill luck will have it that there is a crack in my wine-press, and all the workmen are in the vineyards. Coquebert, do not fail to speak a word to the carpenter, and to call me to the sick man here should his condition become suddenly worse. A host of cares, Coquebert!'

The next day was such a good one for Monsieur Coignard that we nursed the hope that we might yet keep him with us. He took some soup and sat up in bed. He spoke to each of us with his usual gentleness and grace. Monsieur d'Anquetil, who was lodging at Gaulard's, came to see him and, rather thoughtlessly, asked him to play piquet. My good master smilingly promised to do so the following week. But the fever returned at nightfall. Pale, his eyes rolling in unutterable terror, shuddering, and with chattering teeth, he cried:

'There he is, the old Jew! It is the son that Judas Iscariot fathered on a she-devil in the shape of a goat. But he shall be hanged on his father's fig-tree, and his entrails shall be shed on the earth. Stop him! He is killing me! I am cold!' A moment after, throwing back his coverings, he complained of being too hot.

'I am very thirsty,' he said, 'give me some wine. And let it be cool. Madame Coquebert, make haste to go and cool it in the cistern, for the day promises to be burning.'

It was night-time but he confused the hours in his mind.

'Be quick about it,' he reiterated, to Madame Coquebert, 'but do not be as simple-minded as the bellringer of Séez Cathedral, who, on going to draw the bottles from the well where he had put them, perceived his reflection in the water and began crying out: "Hallo, messieurs, come to my help quickly, for there are antipodeans down there who will drink our wine if we do not see to it."'

'He is cheerful,' said Madame Coquebert. 'But a short time ago he made very shocking accusations against me. Had I deceived Coquebert, it would not have been with Monsieur le Curé, having regard to his age and position.'

Monsieur le Curé came in at that very moment.

'Well, Monsieur l'Abbé,' he said to my master, 'in what humour are you to-day? What is there new?'

'Thank God,' said Monsieur Coignard, 'there is nothing new in my soul. For, as St Chrysostom said, avoid novelties. Do not adventure on paths which are as yet untried; one wanders unendingly when one begins to wander. I have sad experience of it. And I am lost for having followed unbeaten tracks. I listened to my own counsel and it led me to the pit. Monsieur le Curé, I am a miserable sinner; the number of my iniquities oppresses me.'

'Those are noble words,' said Monsieur le Curé. 'It is God Himself who dictates them to you. I recognize His inimitable style. Are you not desirous that we should join in furthering the salvation of your soul a little?'

'Willingly,' said Monsieur Coignard, 'for my impurities rise up against me. I see both great and small rear themselves before me. I see some that are red and some that are black. I see some of the very basest astride of dogs and pigs, and I see others that are fat and stark naked, with teats like leather bottles, stomachs falling in big folds, and enormous buttocks.'

'Is it possible,' said Monsieur le Curé, 'that you have so distinct a sight of them? But, if your faults are such as you say, my son, it were better not to describe them, and to limit yourself to detesting them inwardly.'

'Would you have my sins fashioned like Adonis, Monsieur le Curé?' said the Abbé. 'But enough of that. And you, barber, give me something to drink. Do you know Monsieur de la Musardière?'

'Not that I am aware of,' said Monsieur Coquebert.

'Learn, then, that he was very fond of women,' said my good master.

'It is thereby,' said the priest, 'that the devil takes great advantage of man. But what are you driving at, my son?'

'You will soon see,' said my good master. 'Monsieur de la Musardière gave tryst to a maiden in a stable. She went, and he let her go as she came. Do you know why?'

'I don't,' said the priest. 'But enough of that.'

'Not so,' continued Monsieur Coignard. 'Know then, that he took care to have no connection with her for fear of engendering a horse, for which he would have been criminally prosecuted.'

'Ah,' said the barber, 'he might rather have feared to father a donkey.'

'Without doubt!' said the priest. 'But that does not help us on our way to paradise. It befits us to take up the good road again. A short time since you gave us such edifying words.'

Instead of replying, my good master began to sing in quite a strong voice:

'To put King Louis in good fettle
They sent for a dozen lads of mettle,
Landerinette,
Who led a jovial life and free,
Landeriri.'

'If you want to sing, my son,' said Monsieur le Curé, 'sing rather some beautiful Burgundian carol. You will gladden your soul while you sanctify it.'

'Willingly,' answered my good master. 'There are some by Guy Barozai which I hold, in their apparent rusticity, as finer than the diamond and more precious than gold. This one, for instance:

Then when the time did befall
That Jesus Christ came on to earth,
The ox and ass with their breath
Kept him warm in the stall.
How many an ox and an ass
I know in the kingdom of Gaul,
How many an ox and an ass
Would have grudged him that little, alas!'

The surgeon, his wife, and the priest took up together:

'How many an ox and an ass
I know in the kingdom of Gaul,
How many an ox and an ass
Would grudge him that little, alas!'

And my good master went on in more feeble voice:

'But the part of the tale I like best,
Is that the ox and the ass

Both of them let the night pass
Without food or water or rest.
How many an ox and an ass
In stuff, or in silken vest,
How many an ox and an ass
Would grudge him that little, alas!'

Then he let his head fall back on the pillow and sang no more.

'There is good in this Christian,' said Monsieur le Curé. 'Much good, and just now again he edified even me by his beautiful words. But he still causes me anxiety, for all hangs on the end; and one does not know what may remain at the bottom of the basket. God, in His goodness, wills that a single moment should save us; but this moment must be the last; so that everything depends on a single minute, by the side of which the rest of our life is as nothing. This is what makes me tremble for this sick man, for whom the angels and the devils are fighting so fiercely. But one must not despair of the divine mercy.'

XX

Two days passed in cruel alternations. Thereafter my good master fell into a state of extreme weakness.

'There is no longer any hope,' Monsieur Coquebert said in a low voice. 'Look how his head is sunk into the pillow and notice how sharp his nose has become.'

Indeed, my good master's nose, formerly big and red, offered no more than a curved edge as livid as lead.

'Tournebroche, my son,' he said, in a voice which was still full and strong, but with a note in it I had not heard before, 'I feel that I have but a short time to live. Go and find that good priest that he may hear my confession.'

Monsieur le Curé was in his vineyard, whither I ran.

'The vintage is done,' he told me, 'and a more abundant one than I hoped; let us go and assist the poor man.'

I took him back to the bedside of my good master and we left him alone with the dying man.

He came out after an hour and said to us:

'I can assure you that Monsieur Jérôme Coignard is dying in admirable sentiments of piety and humility. At his request, and in consideration of his fervour, I am about to give him the holy viaticum. While I put on my alb and stole have the goodness, Madame Coquebert, to send the child who serves low mass for me every day to the sacristy, and prepare the room to receive the Blessed Sacrament.'

Madame Coquebert swept the chamber, put a white coverlet on the bed, placed at the head of it a small table which she covered with a cloth, put two candlesticks with lighted candles upon it, and a china bowl where a sprig of box lay steeped in the holy water.

Soon we heard the bell being rung in the road by the server, and we saw the cross appear, held up by a child, and the priest clad in white and bearing the sacred elements. Jael, Monsieur d'Anquetil, Monsieur and Madame Coquebert, and I, fell on our knees.

'Pax huic domui,' said the priest.

'Et omnibus habitantibus in ea,' answered the server.

Then Monsieur le Curé took the holy water, with which he sprinkled the sick man and the bed.

He remained in meditation for a moment and then said:

'My son, have you no declaration to make?'

'Yes, monsieur,' said Abbé Coignard in a firm voice. 'I forgive my assassin.'

Then the celebrant, drawing the Host from the ciborium, said:

'Ecce agnus Dei, qui tollit peccata mundi.'

My good master answered, sighing:

'Shall I speak with my Lord, I who am but dust and ashes? How shall I venture to approach Thee, I who feel that no good exists in me that can give me courage? How can I receive Thee within me after having so often offended Thine eyes filled with loving-kindness?'

And Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard received the holy viaticum in a profound silence, broken by our sobs and by the loud noise made by Madame Coquebert blowing her nose.

After the ceremony my good master made a sign to me to draw near his bed, and said in a voice weak but distinct:

'Jacques Tournebroche, my son, reject, along with the example I gave you, the maxims I may have proposed to you during my period of folly, which, alas, has lasted as long as my life. Fear women and books for the enervation and the pride they induce in us. Be humble in heart and mind. God grants a clearer intelligence to the simple-minded than the learned can ever instil. He is the giver of all knowledge, my son. Do not listen to those who, like myself, subtilize over good and evil. Do not allow yourself to be touched by the beauty and the nicety of their talk. For the kingdom of God lies not in words but in virtue.'

He lay silent, exhausted. I seized his hand lying on the sheet and covered it with my tears and kisses. I told him he was our master, our friend, our father, and that I could not live without him.

And I remained for a long time sunk in sorrow at the foot of his bed.

He passed such a peaceful night that I conceived a sort of despairing hope. This condition lasted all through the day that followed. But towards evening he became restless and murmured such indistinct words that they must for ever remain a secret between God and himself.

At midnight he sank once more into a state of utter prostration, and we only heard the light sound of his nails plucking at the sheets. He knew us no longer.

Towards two o'clock the death-rattle began; the hoarse, hurried breathing that issued from his chest was loud enough to be heard far off in the village street, and my ears were so filled with it that I thought I could hear it for days following that wretched night. At dawn he made a sign with his hand which we could not understand, and gave a deep sigh. It was the last. His countenance assumed in death a majesty worthy of the genius which had animated it, and whose loss will never be repaired.

XXI

Monsieur le Curé of Vallars gave Monsieur Jérôme Coignard solemn burial. He sang the funeral mass and gave absolution.

My good master was borne to the cemetery attached to the church. And Monsieur d'Anquetil gave a supper at Gaulard's to all the people who had been present at the ceremony. They drank new wine and sang the songs of Burgundy.

The following day I went with Monsieur d'Anquetil to thank Monsieur le Curé for his pious care.

'Ah,' said the holy man, 'this priest has given us great consolation by his edifying end. I have seen few Christians die in such admirable sentiments, and the memory of them should be preserved on his tomb in a fine inscription. You are both of you clever enough to do this successfully, and I will see to it that the epitaph of the defunct is engraved on a large white stone in the fashion and order in which you shall compose it. But bear in mind, in thus making the stone speak, that it proclaim but the praises of God.'

I begged him to believe that I would bring all my zeal to bear on it, and Monsieur d'Anquetil promised, on his part, to give it a gallant and graceful turn.

'I will try my hand,' he said, 'at French verse, modelled on that of Monsieur Chapelle.'

'Well and good,' said Monsieur le Curé. 'But are you not curious to see my wine-press? The wine will be excellent this year and I have gathered enough for my use and for that of my servant. Alas, were it not for the blight we should have had far more.'

After supper, Monsieur d'Anquetil asked for the inkstand and began to compose French verses. Then, impatiently, he flung pen, ink, and paper away from him.

'Tournebroche,' he said, 'I have only written two lines

and I am not certain if even those are good; here they are such as they have come to me:

Monsieur Coignard here doth lie,
Soon or late we all must die.'

I answered that they had this much good in them that they needed no third.

And I spent the night in turning a Latin epitaph in the following manner:

D.O.M.
HIC JACET
in spe beatae aeternitatis
DOMINUS HIERONYMUS COIGNARD
presbyter
quondam in Bellovacensi collegio
eloquentiae magister eloquentissimus
Sagiensis episcopi bibliothecarius solertissimus
Zozimi Panopolitani ingeniosissimus
translator
opere tamen immaturata morte intercepto
periit enim cum Lugdunum peteret
judea manu nefandissima
id est a nepote Christi carnificum
in via trucidatus
anno aet. liio.
Comitate fuit optima doctissimo convitu
ingenio sublimi
facetiis jucundus sententiis plenus
donorum Dei laudator
fide devotissima per multas tempestates
constanter munitus
humilitate sanctissima ornatus
saluti suae magis intentus
quam vano et fallaci hominum judicio
sic honoribus mundanis
nunquam quaesitis
sibi gloriam sempiternam
meruit.

Which means:

HERE LIES
in hope of blissful eternity
MESSIRE JÉRÔME COIGNARD
priest
formerly eloquent professor of eloquence
in the college of Beauvais
most zealous librarian to the bishop
of Séez
author of a fine translation from Zozimus
the Panopolitan
which unhappily he left unfinished
when overtaken by premature death.
He was struck down on the Lyons road
in the 52nd year of his age
by the scoundrelly hand of a Jew
and thus perished a victim to a descendant of the executioners
of Jesus Christ.
He was agreeable in intercourse
learned in conversation
and of a lofty genius
abounding in joyful and admirable precepts
and praised God in his works.
Through the tempest of life he kept
an unshaken faith
more careful for the salvation of his soul
than for the empty and deceitful goodwill of mankind.
It was while living without honours
in this world
that he directed his path to eternal glory.

XXII

THREE days after my good master had rendered up his soul, Monsieur d'Anquetil decided to set off once more. The carriage was mended. He gave orders to the postilions to be ready for the following morning. His society had never been pleasing to me. In the sad mood I was in, it

had become odious. I could not bear the idea of following him with Jael. I resolved to seek employment at Tournus or Mâcon and to live there hidden until, the storm having abated, it would be possible for me to return to Paris, where I knew my parents would receive me with open arms. I made known this plan to Monsieur d'Anquetil and excused myself for not accompanying him farther. He exerted himself at first to keep me with a good grace which he had not led me to expect, then he willingly gave me my leave. Jael was more regretful over it, but, being naturally sensible, she understood the reasons I had for leaving her.

The night preceding my departure, while Monsieur d'Anquetil drank and played cards with the surgeon-barber, we went out on to the market-place, Jael and I, to breathe the air. It was scented with herbs and filled with the song of crickets.

'What a beautiful night!' I said to Jael. 'The year will bring no more like it, and perhaps, in all my life, I shall never again see one so sweet.'

Before us the village cemetery, flower-filled, spread its immobile waves of grass, and the moonlight whitened the scattered gravestones on the dark herbage. The thought came to us both at the same time to go and say good-bye to our friend. The spot where he reposed was marked by a cross sprinkled with tears, whose foot sank in the soft earth. The stone on which the epitaph was to be inscribed was not put up yet. We sat down quite near, on the grass, and there, from an unconscious and natural inclination, we fell into one another's arms, without fear of offending with our kisses the memory of a friend whose profound wisdom rendered him indulgent to human weaknesses.

All at once Jael whispered in my ear, where for the moment her lips happened to be:

'I see Monsieur d'Anquetil on the cemetery wall, and he is looking keenly in our direction.'

'Can he see us in the shadow?' I asked.

'He can certainly see my white skirts,' she replied. 'It is quite enough to make him want to see more.'

I was already thinking of drawing my sword and I was quite decided to defend two lives which at the moment were indeed all but one. Jael's calm astonished me; nothing in her gestures or her voice betrayed fear.

'Go,' said she, 'fly, have no fear for me. It is a surprise which I have more or less desired. He was beginning to tire, and this is excellent for reawakening his taste and adding a spice to his love. Go and leave me. The first few moments will be hard to bear, for he is of a passionate disposition. He will beat me but I shall only be dearer to him afterwards. Farewell.'

'Alas,' I exclaimed, 'did you but take me, Jael, to sharpen the desires of a rival?'

'I am surprised that you, too, wish to quarrel with me. Go, I tell you!'

'What, and leave you thus?'

'It must be. Farewell. He must not find you here. I want to make him jealous, but with discretion. Farewell, farewell!'

I had scarcely taken a few steps in the labyrinth of tombs when Monsieur d'Anquetil, having come near enough to recognize his mistress, cried and swore loud enough to wake all these village dead. I was impatient to free Jael from his wrath. I thought he would kill her. Already I was gliding to her rescue in the shadow of the tombs. But after some minutes, while I watched them carefully, I saw Monsieur d'Anquetil push her out of the cemetery and take her to Gaulard's inn, with the remains of a fury she was well capable of pacifying alone and without help.

I regained my room when they had gone back to theirs. I did not sleep that night, and spying on them in the dawn, through the opening in the curtains, I saw them cross the courtyard of the inn with great show of friendship.

Jael's departure increased my sadness. I threw myself full length in the middle of my room, and, my face in my hands, wept till evening.

XXIII

At this period, my life loses the interest it had borrowed from circumstances, and my destiny, conforming once more with my character, offers nothing but what is commonplace. If I prolonged my memoirs, my narrative would soon appear insipid. I will bring it to a close in few words. Monsieur le Curé of Vallars gave me a letter of recommendation to a wine merchant in Mâcon, with whom I found employment for two months, at the end of which my father wrote he had arranged my affairs and that I could return to Paris without any danger.

I immediately took the coach and made the journey with some recruits. My heart beat as if it would burst when I saw once again the rue Saint-Jacques, the clock of Saint-Benoît-le-Bétourné, the sign-board of the 'Trois Pucelles,' and the 'St Catherine' of Monsieur Blaizot.

My mother wept at the sight of me. I wept, we embraced, and we wept anew. My father, coming in all haste from the 'Petit Bacchus,' said, with softened dignity:

'Jacquot, my son, I will not hide from you that I was very irritated with you when I saw the police enter the 'Reine Pédauque' to take you, or, failing you, to take me in your place. They would not listen to anything, affirming that it would be permitted to me to explain myself in prison. They sought you on a complaint lodged by Monsieur de la Guéritaude. I formed a horrible notion of your evil ways in my own mind. But, having learnt from your letters that they were but peccadilloes, I thought only of seeing you again. I have consulted many a time with the landlord of the "Petit Bacchus" on the means of hushing up this affair. He always answered me: "Maître Léonard, go and find the judge with a big bag of crowns and he will give you back your son as white as snow." But crowns are rare here, and there is neither chicken, goose, nor duck which lays golden eggs in my house. At the most, nowadays, the poultry pay but for the fire in my chimney. By good luck, your sainted and worthy mother had the idea of going to see

Monsieur d'Anquetil's mother, who we knew was busied in her son's favour, sought for at the same time as you and for the same affair. For I recognize, my Jacquot, that you have played the fool in company with a gentleman, and my heart is too well placed not to feel the honour which is thus reflected upon all the family. Your mother then asked for an interview with Madame d'Anquetil in her house in the Faubourg Saint-Antoine. She had dressed herself neatly as if she were going to mass, and Madame d'Anquetil received her kindly. Your mother is a saintly woman, Jacquot, but she hasn't much knowledge of the world, and she spoke at first unconventionally and in an unseemly fashion. She said: "Madame, at our age, nothing is left us, after God, but our children." It was not the thing to say to that great lady who still has her lovers.'

'Be quiet, Léonard,' said my mother. 'Madame d'Anquetil's behaviour is not known to you, and I must have spoken well enough to the lady, for she replied: "Be at peace, Madame Ménétrier, I will act for your son as for my own; count on my zeal." And you know, Léonard, that before two months had elapsed we received the assurance that our Jacquot could return to Paris without any anxiety.'

We supped with good appetite. My father asked me whether I counted on remaining in Monsieur d'Astarac's service. I replied that after the ever-to-be-regretted death of my good master I had no wish to find myself again with that cruel Mosaïde and with a gentleman who paid his servants only in fine speeches. My father obligingly invited me to turn his spit as before.

'Latterly, I have given the employment to Brother Ange, Jacquot,' he told me, 'but he acquitted himself less well than Miraut and even than you. Will you not take your place again on the stool in the chimney-corner, my son?'

My mother who, simple as she was, did not lack judgment, shrugged her shoulders and said:

'Monsieur Blaizot, who is a bookseller at the sign of "St Catherine," has need of an assistant. That employ-

ment, my son, would fit you like a glove. You have gentle ways and good manners. That is what is suitable for the selling of Bibles.'

I went at once and offered myself to Monsieur Blaizot, who took me into his service.

My misfortunes had rendered me wise. I was not discouraged by the humbleness of my task, and I fulfilled it with exactitude, handling the feather-brush and the broom to my employer's satisfaction.

My duty was to pay a call on Monsieur d'Astarac. I presented myself at the great alchemist's the last Sunday in November, after the midday dinner. The distance is great from the rue Saint-Jacques to the Cross of Les Sablons, and the almanac does not lie when it tells us that the days are short in November. When I arrived at Le Roule night had fallen, and a dark fog covered the deserted road. I meditated sadly in the gloom.

'Alas,' I said to myself, 'it will soon be a year since for the first time I took this same road, in the snow, in the company of my good master, who rests now on a vine-covered hill in a village of Burgundy. He fell asleep in the hope of eternal life. And that is a hope it is befitting to share with so learned and wise a man. God keep me from ever doubting the immortality of the soul. But one must own to oneself that all that belongs to a future existence and to another world appertains to those imperceptible truths which one believes without being affected by them, and which have neither taste nor savour, so that one swallows them without being aware of them. For my part, I am not consoled by the thought of one day meeting Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard once more in paradise. Surely he would not be recognizable, and his speeches would not have the charm they borrowed from circumstances.'

While making these reflections, I saw before me a great light spreading over half the sky; the fog was reddened with it right over my head, and the light flickered at its source. A heavy smoke mingled with the vapours of the air. I feared at once that it was the Château d'Astarac on fire. I hastened my steps, and soon saw that my fears

were but too well founded. I perceived the Calvary of Les Sablons opaquely black against a sheet of flame, and I saw, nearly at the same time, the château, whose windows all blazed as if for a sinister revel. The little green door was burst open. Shadows moved in the park and whispered in horror. They were the inhabitants of the town of Neuilly, who had hastened thither out of curiosity and to bring help. Some were throwing from a pump jets of water, which fell like glittering rain in the blazing furnace. A thick column of smoke rose above the château. A rain of sparks and cinders fell around me, and I soon perceived that my clothes and hands were blackened with them. I thought with despair that this dust which filled the air was the remains of so many beautiful books and precious manuscripts, which had been my master's joy, the remains, perhaps, of Zozimus the Panopolitan, at which we had worked together during the noblest hours of my life.

I had seen Monsieur l'Abbé Coignard die. This time it was his very soul, his shining and gentle soul, that I thought I saw reduced to powder with the queen of libraries. I felt that a part of myself was destroyed at the same time. The wind which was rising added strength to the fire, and the flames roared like hungry throats.

Seeing a man from Neuilly, blacker than I was myself, and wearing but his jacket, I asked him if they had saved Monsieur d'Astarac and his people.

'No one,' he said, 'has come out of the château except an old Jew, who was seen to escape with some bundles towards the marshes. He lived in the keeper's cottage on the river, and was hated for his origin and for the crimes of which he was suspected. Some children pursued him, and in flying he fell into the Seine. He was taken out of the water dead, holding to his heart a book of magic and six gold cups. You can see him on the bank in his yellow robe. He is awful, with open eyes.'

'Ah,' I replied, 'his end was due to his crimes. But his death will not give me back the best of masters, whom he assassinated. Tell me again, has no one seen Monsieur d'Astarac?'

At the moment when I asked this question I heard one of the restless shadows near me give a terror-stricken cry:

'The roof is going to fall in.'

Then I recognized with horror the tall black form of Monsieur d'Astarac running along the gutter. The alchemist cried in a ringing voice:

'I rise on the wings of the flame into the abode of divine life.'

He spoke; all at once the roof gave way with a horrible crash, and flames high as mountains enveloped the friend of the salamanders.

XXIV

There is no love can outlast absence. The memory of Jael, painful at first, softened little by little, and there remained to me but a vague restlessness, of which she was not even the unique object.

Monsieur Blaizot waxed old. He withdrew to Montrouge, to his little house in the country, and sold me his stock-in-trade in consideration of an income for life. Becoming, in his place, sworn bookseller at the sign of the 'Image of St Catherine,' I made my father and mother retire there, for their cook-shop had not paid for some time past. I had a liking for my modest shop and I was solicitous to deck it. I nailed old Venetian maps on the doors, and theses ornamented with allegorical engravings which made an odd and old-world ornamentation no doubt, but pleasant to friends of the classics. My knowledge, provided that I took care to hide it, did me no harm in my business. It would have stood more in my light had I been, like Marc-Michel Rey, bookseller and publisher, and obliged, as he was, to earn my living at the expense of public stupidity.

I stock, as they say, the classic authors, and it is a commodity which has its price in this learned rue Saint-Jacques, whose antiquities and illustrious occupants it would give me pleasure one day to write of. The first Parisian printer set up his venerable presses here. The

Cramoisys, whom Guy Patin calls the kings of the rue Saint-Jacques, sent forth from here the collected works of our historians. Before the College of France rose up, the king's readers, Pierre Danès, François Votable, and Ramus, gave their lessons in a shed where resounded the quarrels of porters and washerwomen. And how can we forget Jean de Meung, who, in a little house in this street, composed the *Romaunt of the Rose*?[1]

I have the run of all the house, which is old, and dates at least from the Gothic period, as appears in the beams of wood which cross on the narrow façade, in the two projecting stories, and in the overhanging roof laden with moss-grown tiles. It has but one window on each floor. The one on the first floor is full of flowers in all seasons and furnished with strings on which convolvulus and nasturtium climb in the springtime. My good mother sows and waters them.

It is the window of her room. One can see her from the street, reading her prayers from a book printed in large type, above the sign of the 'Image of St Catherine.' Years, devotion, and maternal pride have given her an air of dignity, and to see her waxen face under the high white coif one would swear it was that of a rich *bourgeoise*.

My father, with advancing years, has also acquired a certain dignity. As he likes fresh air and exercise I occupy him in taking out the books. At first I had employed Brother Ange, but he asked alms of my customers, made them kiss relics, stole their wine, caressed their maid-servants, and left the half of my books in the gutters of the neighbourhood. I relieved him of his post as soon as possible. But my good mother, whom he makes believe he possesses secrets wherewith to gain heaven, gives him soup and wine. He is not a bad man and he has ended by inspiring me with a sort of attachment.

Many savants and some of our wits frequent my shop.

[1] Jacques Tournebroche was unaware that François Villon lived in the rue Saint-Jacques, at the house in the cloister of Saint-Benoît, called the House of the Green Door. Monsieur Jérôme Coignard's pupil would no doubt have taken pleasure in recalling the memory of this old poet who like him, had known divers kinds of people. (*Author's note.*)

And it is the great advantage of my position to be brought into daily intercourse with people of worth. Among those who come oftenest to turn over the leaves of the new books and converse familiarly with one another, are historians as learned as Tillemont; ecclesiastical orators who equal Bossuet and even Bourdaloue in eloquence; poets, comic and tragic; theologians in whom pureness of morals is joined to solidity of doctrine; esteemed authors of Spanish romances; geometricians and philosophers, capable, like Monsieur Descartes, of measuring and weighing universes. I admire them, I delight in their lightest words. But not one, to my thinking, equals in genius the good master that I had the misfortune to lose on the Lyons road; not one recalls that incomparable elegance of thought, that sweet sublimity, that amazing richness of a soul always overflowing and pouring itself forth, like the urns of those personified rivers one sees represented in marble in the gardens; not one offers me that inexhaustible well-spring of knowledge and morals wherein I had the happiness of slaking the thirst of my youth; not one gives me even the shadow of that grace, that wisdom, that vigour of thought which shone in Monsieur Jérôme Coignard. Him I hold for the kindliest soul that ever blossomed on this earth.

THE REVOLT OF THE ANGELS

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I

Containing in a few lines the history of a French family from 1789 *to the present day.*

BENEATH the shadow of St Sulpice the ancient mansion of the d'Esparvieu family rears its austere three stories between a moss-grown forecourt and a garden hemmed in, as the years have elapsed, by ever loftier and more intrusive buildings, wherein, nevertheless, two tall chestnut trees still lift their withered heads.

Here from 1825 to 1857 dwelt the great man of the family, Alexandre Bussart d'Esparvieu, Vice-President of the Council of State under the Government of July, member of the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, and author of an *Essay on the Civil and Religious Institutions of Nations*, in three octavo volumes, a work unfortunately left incomplete.

This eminent theorist of a Liberal monarchy left as heir to his name his fortune, and his fame, Fulgence-Adolphe Bussart d'Esparvieu, senator under the Second Empire, who added largely to his patrimony by buying land over which the avenue de l'Impératice was destined ultimately to pass, and who made a remarkable speech in favour of the temporal power of the popes.

Fulgence had three sons. The eldest, Marc-Alexandre, entering the army, made a splendid career for himself: he was a good speaker. The second, Gaétan, showing no particular aptitude for anything, lived mostly in the country, where he hunted, bred horses, and devoted himself to music and painting. The third son, René, destined from his childhood for the law, resigned his deputyship to avoid complicity in the Ferry decrees against the religious orders; and later, perceiving the revival under the presidency of Monsieur Fallières of the days of Decius

and Diocletian, put his knowledge and zeal at the service of the persecuted Church.

From the Concordat of 1801 down to the closing years of the Second Empire all the d'Esparvieus attended mass for the sake of example. Though sceptics in their inmost hearts, they looked upon religion as an instrument of government.

Marc and René were the first of their race to show any sign of sincere devotion. The general, when still a colonel, had dedicated his regiment to the Sacred Heart, and he practised his faith with a fervour remarkable even in a soldier, though we all know that piety, daughter of heaven, has marked out the hearts of the generals of the Third Republic as her chosen dwelling-place on earth.

Faith has its vicissitudes. Under the old order the masses were believers, not so the aristocracy or the educated middle class. Under the First Empire the army from top to bottom was entirely irreligious. To-day the masses believe nothing. The middle classes wish to believe, and succeed at times, as did Marc and René d'Esparvieu. Their brother Gaétan, on the contrary, the country gentleman, failed to attain to faith. He was an agnostic, a term commonly employed by the modish to avoid the odious one of freethinker. And he openly declared himself an agnostic, contrary to the admirable custom which deems it better to withhold the avowal.

In the century in which we live there are so many modes of belief and of unbelief that future historians will have difficulty in finding their way about. But are we any more successful in disentangling the condition of religious beliefs in the time of Symmachus or of Ambrose?

A fervent Christian, René d'Esparvieu was deeply attached to the Liberal ideas his ancestors had transmitted to him as a sacred heritage. Compelled to oppose a Jacobin and atheistical republic, he still called himself Republican. And it was in the name of liberty that he demanded the independence and sovereignty of the Church.

During the long debates on the separation and the quarrels over the inventories, the synods of the bishops

and the assemblies of the faithful were held in his house. While the most authoritatively accredited leaders of the Catholic party, prelates, generals, senators, deputies, journalists, were met together in the big green drawing-room, and every soul present turned towards Rome with a tender submission or enforced obedience; while Monsieur d'Esparvieu, his elbow on the marble chimney-piece, opposed civil law to canon law, and protested eloquently against the spoliation of the Church of France, two faces of other days, immobile and speechless, looked down on the modern crowd; on the right of the fireplace, painted by David, in shirt-sleeves and drill trousers, was Romain Bussart, a working farmer at Esparvieu, with a rough-and-ready air not untouched with cunning. He had good reason to smile: the worthy man laid the foundation of the family fortunes when he bought Church lands. On the left, painted by Gérard, in full-dress bedizened with orders, was the peasant's son, Baron Émile Bussart d'Esparvieu, Prefect under the Empire, Keeper of the Great Seal under Charles X, who died in 1837, church-warden of his parish, with couplets from *La Pucelle* on his lips.

René d'Esparvieu married in 1888 Marie-Antoinette Coupelle, daughter of Baron Coupelle, ironmaster at Blainville (Haute Loire). Madame René d'Esparvieu had been president since 1903 of the Society of Christian Mothers. These perfect spouses, having married off their eldest daughter in 1908, had three children still at home—a girl and two boys.

Léon, the younger, aged seven, had a room next to his mother and his sister Berthe. Maurice the elder, lived in a little summer-house comprising two rooms at the bottom of the garden. The young man thus gained a freedom which enabled him to endure family life. He was rather good-looking, smart without too much pretence, and the faint smile which merely raised one corner of his mouth did not lack charm.

At twenty-five Maurice possessed the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. Doubting whether a man hath any profit of all his labour which he taketh under the sun, he never put

himself out about anything. From his earliest childhood this young hopeful's sole concern with work had been considering how he might best avoid it, and it was while still in ignorance of the teaching of the École de Droit that he became a doctor of law and a barrister at the Court of Appeal.

He neither pleaded nor practised. He had no knowledge and no desire to acquire any; wherein he conformed to his genius whose engaging fragility he forbore to overload; his instinct fortunately telling him that it was better to understand little than to misunderstand a lot.

As Monsieur l'Abbé Patouille expressed it, Maurice had received from heaven the benefits of a Christian education. From his childhood piety was shown to him in the example of his home, and when on leaving college he was entered at the École de Droit, he found thelore of the doctors, the virtues of the confessors, and the constancy of the nursing mothers of the Church assembled around the paternal hearth. Admitted to social and political life at the time of the great persecution of the Church of France, Maurice did not fail to attend every manifestation of youthful Catholicism; he lent a hand with his parish barricades at the time of the inventories, and with his companions he unharnessed the archbishop's horses when he was driven out from his palace. He showed on all these occasions a modified zeal; one never saw him in the front ranks of the heroic band exciting soldiers to a glorious disobedience or flinging mud and curses at the agents of the law.

He did his duty, nothing more, and if he distinguished himself on the occasion of the great pilgrimage of 1911 among the stretcher-bearers at Lourdes, we have reason to fear it was but to please Madame de la Verdelière, who admired men of muscle. Abbé Patouille, a friend of the family and deeply versed in the knowledge of souls, knew that Maurice had only moderate aspirations to martyrdom. He reproached him with his lukewarmness, and pulled his ear, calling him a bad lot. Anyway, Maurice remained a believer.

Amid the distractions of youth his faith remained intact, since he left it severely alone. He had never examined a

single tenet. Nor had he inquired a whit more closely into the ideas of morality current in the grade of society to which he belonged. He took them just as they came. Thus in every situation that arose he cut an eminently respectable figure, which he would have assuredly failed to do had he been given to meditating on the foundations of morality. He was irritable and hot-tempered and possessed of a sense of honour which he was at great pains to cultivate. He was neither vain nor ambitious. Like the majority of Frenchmen, he disliked parting with his money. Women would never have obtained anything from him had they not known the way to make him give. He believed he despised them; the truth was he adored them. He indulged his appetites so naturally that he never suspected that he had any. What people did not know, himself least of all—though the gleam that occasionally shone in his fine, light-brown eyes might have furnished the hint—was that he had a warm heart and was capable of friendship. For the rest, he was, in the ordinary intercourse of life, no very brilliant specimen.

II

Wherein useful information will be found concerning a library where strange things will shortly come to pass.

DESIROUS of embracing the whole circle of human knowledge, and anxious to bequeath to the world a concrete symbol of his encyclopaedic genius and a display in keeping with his pecuniary resources, Baron Alexandre d'Esparvieu had formed a library of three hundred and sixty thousand volumes, both printed and in manuscript, whereof the greater part emanated from the Benedictines of Ligugé.

By a special clause in his will he enjoined his heirs to add to his library, after his death, whatever they might deem worthy of note in natural, moral, political, philosophical, and religious science.

He had indicated the sums which might be drawn from his estate for the fulfilment of this object, and charged his

eldest son, Fulgence Adolphe, to proceed with these additions. Fulgence Adolphe accomplished with filial respect the wishes expressed by his illustrious father.

After him, this huge library, which represented more than a child's share of the estate, remained undivided between the senator's three sons and two daughters; and René d'Esparvieu, on whom devolved the house in the rue Garancière, became the guardian of the valuable collection. His two sisters, Madame Paulet de Saint-Fain and Madame Cuissart, repeatedly demanded that such a large but unremunerative piece of property should be turned into money. But René and Gaétan bought in the shares of their two co-heirs, and the library was saved. René d'Esparvieu even busied himself in adding to it, thus fulfilling the intentions of its founder. But from year to year he lessened the number and importance of the acquisitions, opining that the intellectual output in Europe was on the wane.

Nevertheless, Gaétan enriched it out of his funds, with works published both in France and abroad which he thought good, and he was not lacking in judgment, though his brothers would never allow that he had a particle. Thanks to this man of leisurely and inquiring mind, Baron Alexandre's collection was kept practically up to date. Even at the present day the d'Esparvieu library, in the departments of theology, jurisprudence, and history, is one of the finest private libraries in all Europe. Here you may study physical science or, to put it better, physical sciences in all their branches, and for that matter metaphysic or metaphysics, that is to say, all that is connected with physics and has no other name, so impossible is it to designate by a substantive that which has no substance, and is but a dream and an illusion. Here you may contemplate with admiration philosophers addressing themselves to the solution, dissolution, and resolution of the absolute, to the determination of the indeterminate, and to the definition of the infinite. Amid this pile of books and booklets, both sacred and profane, you may find everything down to the latest and most fashionable pragmatism.

Other libraries there are, more richly abounding in bind-

ings of venerable antiquity and illustrious origin, whose smooth and soft-hued texture render them delicious to the touch; bindings which the gilder's art has enriched with gossamer, lace-work, foliage, flowers, emblematic devices, and coats of arms; bindings that charm the studious eye with their tender radiance. Other libraries perhaps harbour a greater array of manuscripts illuminated with delicate and brilliant miniatures by artists of Venice, Flanders, or Touraine. But in handsome, sound editions of ancient and modern writers, both sacred and profane, the d'Esparvieu library is second to none. Here one finds all that has come down to us from antiquity; all the Fathers of the Church, the Apologists and the Decretalists, all the Humanists of the Renaissance, all the Encyclopaedists, the whole world of philosophy and science. Therefore it was that Cardinal Merlin, when he deigned to visit it, remarked:

'There is no man whose brain is equal to containing all the knowledge which is piled upon these shelves. Happily it doesn't matter.'

Monseigneur Cachepot, who worked there often when a curate in Paris, was in the habit of saying:

'I see here the stuff to make many a Thomas Aquinas and many an Arius, if only the modern mind had not lost its ancient ardour for good and evil.'

There was no gainsaying that the manuscripts formed the more valuable portion of this immense collection. Noteworthy indeed was the unpublished correspondence of Gassendi, of Father Mersenne, and of Pascal, which threw a new light on the spirit of the seventeenth century. Nor must we forget the Hebrew Bibles, the Talmuds, the Rabbinical treatises, printed and in manuscript, the Aramaic and Samaritan texts, on sheepskin and on tablets of sycamore; in fine, all those antique and valuable copies collected in Egypt and in Syria by the celebrated Moïse de Dina, and acquired at a small cost by Alexandre d'Esparvieu in 1836, when the learned Hebraist died of old age and poverty in Paris.

The d'Esparvieu library occupied the whole of the second floor of the old house. The works thought to be

of but mediocre interest, such as books of Protestant exegesis of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the gift of Monsieur Gaétan, were relegated unbound to the limbo of the upper regions. The catalogue, with its various supplements, ran into no less than eighteen folio volumes. It was quite up to date, and the library was in perfect order. Monsieur Julien Sariette, archivist and palaeographer, who, being poor and retiring, used to make his living by teaching, became, in 1895, tutor to young Maurice on the recommendation of the Bishop of Agra, and with scarcely an interval found himself curator of the Bibliothèque Esparvienne. Endowed with business-like energy and dogged patience, Monsieur Sariette himself classified all the members of this vast body. The system he invented and put into practice was so complicated, the labels he put on the books were made up of so many capital letters and small letters, both Latin and Greek, so many Arabic and Roman numerals, asterisks, double asterisks, triple asterisks, and those signs which in arithmetic express powers and roots, that the mere study of it would have involved more time and labour than would have been required for the complete mastery of algebra, and as no one could be found who would give the hours, that might be more profitably employed in discovering the law of numbers, to the solving of these cryptic symbols, Monsieur Sariette remained the only one capable of finding his way among the intricacies of his system, and without his help it had become an utter impossibility to discover, among the three hundred and sixty thousand volumes confined to his care, the particular volume one happened to require. Such was the result of his labours. Far from complaining about it, he experienced, on the contrary, a lively satisfaction.

Monsieur Sariette loved his library. He loved it with a jealous love. He was there every day at seven o'clock in the morning busy cataloguing at a huge mahogany desk. The slips in his handwriting filled an enormous case standing by his side surmounted by a plaster bust of Alexandre d'Esparvieu. Alexandre wore his hair brushed straight back, and had a sublime look on his face. Like Chateaubriand, he affected little feathery side whiskers. His lips

were pursed, his bosom bare. Punctually at midday Monsieur Sariette used to sally forth to lunch at a *crémerie* in the narrow, gloomy rue des Canettes. It was known as the Crémerie des Quatre Évêques, and had once been the haunt of Baudelaire, Théodore de Banville, Charles Asselineau, Louis Ménard, and a certain grandee of Spain who had translated the *Mysteries of Paris* into the language of the conquistadors. And the ducks that paddle so nicely on the old stone sign which gives its name to the street used to recognize Monsieur Sariette. At a quarter to one, to the very minute, he went back to his library, where he remained until seven o'clock. He then again betook himself to the 'Quatre Évêques,' and sat down to his frugal dinner, with its crowning glory of stewed prunes. Every evening, after dinner, his crony, Michel Guinardon, universally known as Père Guinardon, a scene-painter and picture-restorer, who used to do work for churches, would come from his garret in the rue Princesse to have his coffee and liqueur at the 'Quatre Évêques,' and the two friends would play their game of dominoes.

Old Guinardon, who was like some rugged old tree still full of sap, was older than he could bring himself to believe; he had known Chenavard. His chastity was positively ferocious, and he was for ever denouncing the impurities of neo-paganism in language of alarming obscenity. He loved talking. Monsieur Sariette was a ready listener. Old Guinardon's favourite subject was the Chapelle des Anges in St Sulpice, in which the paintings were peeling off the walls, and which he was one day to restore; when, that is, it should please God, for, since the separation, the churches belonged solely to God, and no one would undertake the responsibility of even the most urgent repairs. But old Guinardon demanded no salary.

'Michael is my patron saint,' he said. 'And I have a special devotion for the Holy Angels.'

After they had had their game of dominoes, Monsieur Sariette, very thin and small, and old Guinardon, sturdy as an oak, hirsute as a lion, and tall as a St Christopher, went off chatting away side by side across the place St Sulpice, heedless of whether the night were fine or stormy.

Monsieur Sariette always went straight home, much to the regret of the painter, who was a gadabout and a night-bird.

The following day, as the clock struck seven, Monsieur Sariette would take up his place in the library, and resume his cataloguing. As he sat at his desk, however, he would dart a Medusa-like look at any one who entered, fearing lest he should prove to be a book-borrower. It was not merely the magistrates, politicians, and prelates whom he would have liked to turn to stone when they came to ask for the loan of a book with an air of authority bred of their familiarity with the master of the house. He would have done as much to Monsieur Gaétan, the library's benefactor, when he wanted some gay or scandalous old volume wherewith to beguile a wet day in the country. He would have meted out similar treatment to Madame René d'Esparvieu, when she came to look for a book to read to her sick poor in hospital, and even to Monsieur René d'Esparvieu himself, who generally contented himself with the Civil Code and a volume of Dalloz. The borrowing of the smallest book seemed like dragging his heart out. To refuse a volume even to such as had the most incontestable right to it, Monsieur Sariette would invent countless far-fetched or clumsy fibs, and did not even shrink from slandering himself as curator or from casting doubts on his own vigilance by saying that such and such a book was mislaid or lost, when a moment ago he had been gloating over that very volume or pressing it to his bosom. And when ultimately forced to part with a volume he would take it back a score of times from the borrower before he finally relinquished it.

He was always in agony lest one of the objects confided to his care should escape him. As the guardian of three hundred and sixty thousand volumes, he had three hundred and sixty thousand reasons for alarm. Sometimes he woke at night bathed in sweat, and uttering a cry of fear, because he had dreamed he had seen a gap on one of the shelves of his bookcases. It seemed to him a monstrous, unheard-of, and most grievous thing that a volume should leave its habitat. This noble rapacity exasperated Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, who, failing to understand

the good qualities of his paragon of a librarian, called him an old maniac. Monsieur Sariette knew naught of this injustice, but he would have faced the cruellest misfortunes and endured opprobrium and insult to safeguard the integrity of his trust. Thanks to his assiduity, his vigilance, and zeal, or, in a word, to his love, the d'Esparvieu library had not lost so much as a single leaf under his supervision during the sixteen years which had elapsed by the ninth of September 1912.

III

Wherein the mystery begins.

At seven o'clock on the evening of that day, having as usual replaced all the books which had been taken from their shelves, and having assured himself that he was leaving everything in good order, he quitted the library, double-locking the door after him. According to his usual habit, he dined at the Crémerie des Quatre Évêques, read his newspaper, *La Croix*, and at ten o'clock went home to his little house in the rue du Regard. The good man had no trouble and no presentiment of evil; his sleep was peaceful. The next morning at seven o'clock to the minute, he entered the little room leading to the library, and, according to his daily habit, doffed his best frock coat, and taking down an old one which hung in a cupboard over his washstand, put it on. Then he went in to his workroom, where for sixteen years he had been cataloguing six days out of the seven, under the lofty gaze of Alexandre d'Esparvieu. Preparing to make a round of the various rooms, he entered the first and largest, which contained works on theology and religion in huge cupboards whose cornices were adorned with bronzed plaster busts of poets and orators of ancient days. Two enormous globes representing the earth and the heavens filled the window embrasures. But at his first step Monsieur Sariette stopped dead, stupefied, powerless alike to doubt or to credit what his eyes beheld. On the blue cloth cover of the writing table books lay scattered about

pell-mell, some lying flat, some standing upright. A number of quartos were heaped up in a tottering pile. Two Greek lexicons, one inside the other, formed a single being more monstrous in shape than the human couples of the divine Plato. A gilt-edged folio was all agape, showing three of its leaves disgracefully dog's-eared.

Having, after an interval of some moments, recovered from his profound amazement, the librarian went up to the table and recognized in the confused mass his most valuable Hebrew, French, and Latin Bibles, a unique Talmud, Rabbinical treatises printed and in manuscript, Aramaic and Samaritan texts and scrolls from the synagogues—in fine, the most precious relics of Israel all lying in a disordered heap, gaping and crumpled.

Monsieur Sariette found himself confronted with an inexplicable phenomenon; nevertheless he sought to account for it. How eagerly he would have welcomed the idea that Monsieur Gaétan, who, being a thoroughly unprincipled man, presumed on the right gained him by his fatal liberality towards the library to rummage there unhindered during his sojourns in Paris, had been the author of this terrible disorder. But Monsieur Gaétan was away travelling in Italy. After pondering for some minutes Monsieur Sariette's next supposition was that Monsieur René d'Esparvieu had entered the library late in the evening with the keys of his manservant Hippolyte, who, for the past twenty-five years, had looked after the second floor and the attics. Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, however, never worked at night, and did not read Hebrew. Perhaps, thought Monsieur Sariette, perhaps he had brought or allowed to be brought to this room some priest, or Jerusalem monk, on his way through Paris; some oriental savant given to scriptural exegesis. Monsieur Sariette next wondered whether the Abbé Patouille, who had an inquiring mind, and also a habit of dog's-earing his books, had, peradventure, flung himself on these talmudic and biblical texts, fired with sudden zeal to lay bare the soul of Shem. He even asked himself for a moment whether Hippolyte, the old manservant, who had swept and dusted the library for a quarter of a century, and had

been slowly poisoned by the dust of accumulated knowledge, had allowed his curiosity to get the better of him, and had been there during the night, ruining his eyesight and his reason and losing his soul, poring by moonlight over these undecipherable symbols. Monsieur Sariette even went so far as to imagine that young Maurice, on leaving his club or some Nationalist meeting, might have torn these Jewish volumes from their shelves, out of hatred for old Jacob and his modern posterity; for this young man of family was a declared anti-Semite, and only consorted with those Jews who were as anti-Semitic as himself. It was giving a very free rein to his imagination, but Monsieur Sariette's brain could not rest, and went wandering about among speculations of the wildest extravagance.

Impatient to know the truth, the zealous guardian of the library called the manservant.

Hippolyte knew nothing. The porter at the lodge could not furnish any clue. None of the domestics had heard a sound. Monsieur Sariette went down to the study of Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, who received him in nightcap and dressing-gown, listened to his story with the air of a serious man bored with idle chatter, and dismissed him with words which conveyed a cruel implication of pity.

'Do not worry, my good Monsieur Sariette; be sure that the books were lying where you left them last night.'

Monsieur Sariette reiterated his inquiries a score of times, discovered nothing, and suffered such anxiety that sleep entirely forsook him. When on the following day at seven o'clock he entered the room with the busts and globes, and saw that all was in order, he heaved a sigh of relief. Then suddenly his heart beat fit to burst. He had just seen lying flat on the mantelpiece a paper-bound volume, a modern work, the boxwood paper-knife which had served to cut its pages still thrust between the leaves. It was a dissertation on the two parallel versions of Genesis, a work which Monsieur Sariette had relegated to the attic, and which had never left it up to now, no one in Monsieur d'Esparvieu's circle having had the curiosity to differentiate

between the parts for which the polytheistic and monotheistic contributors were respectively responsible in the formation of the first of the sacred books. This book bore the label R<3214 $\frac{VIII}{2}$. And this painful truth was suddenly borne in upon the mind of Monsieur Sariette: to wit that the most scientific system of numbering will not help to find a book if the book is no longer in its place.

Every day of the ensuing month found the table littered with books. Greek and Latin lay cheek by jowl with Hebrew. Monsieur Sariette asked himself whether these nocturnal removals were the work of evil-doers who entered by the skylights to steal valuable and precious volumes. But he found no traces of burglary, and, notwithstanding the most minute search, failed to discover that anything had disappeared. Terrible anxiety took possession of his mind, and he fell to wondering whether it was possible that some monkey in the neighbourhood came down the chimney and acted the part of a person engaged in study. Deriving his knowledge of the habits of these animals in the main from the paintings of Watteau and Chardin, he took it that in the art of imitating gestures or assuming characters they resembled Harlequin, Scaramouch, Zerline, and the doctors of the Italian comedy; he imagined them handling a palette and brushes, pounding drugs in a mortar, or turning over the leaves of an old treatise on alchemy beside an athanor. And so it was that, when, on one unhappy morning, he saw a huge blot of ink on one of the leaves of the third volume of the polyglot Bible bound in blue morocco and adorned with the arms of the Comte de Mirabeau, he had no doubt that a monkey was the author of the evil deed. The monkey had been pretending to take notes and had upset the inkpot. It must be a monkey belonging to a learned professor.

Imbued with this idea, Monsieur Sariette carefully studied the topography of the district, so as to isolate the group of houses amid which the d'Esparvieu house stood. Then he visited the four surrounding streets, asking at every door if there was a monkey in the house. He interrogated porters and their wives, washerwomen,

servants, a cobbler, a greengrocer, a glazier, clerks in bookshops, a priest, a bookbinder, two guardians of the peace, children, thus testing the diversity of character and variety of temper in one and the same people; for the replies he received were quite dissimilar in nature; some were rough, some were gentle; there were the coarse and the polished, the simple and the ironical, the prolix and the abrupt, the brief, and even the silent. But of the animal he sought he had had neither sight nor sound, when under the archway of an old house in the rue Servandoni, a small, freckled, red-haired girl who looked after the door made reply:

'There is Monsieur Ordonneau's monkey; would you care to see it?'

And without another word she conducted the old man to a stable at the other end of the yard. There on some rank straw and old bits of cloth, a young macaco with a chain round his middle sat and shivered. He was no taller than a five-year-old child. His livid face, his wrinkled brow, his thin lips were all expressive of mortal sadness. He fixed on the visitor the still lively gaze of his yellow eyes. Then with his small, dry hand he seized a carrot, put it to his mouth, and forthwith flung it away. Having looked at the new-comers for a moment, the exile turned away his head, as if he expected nothing further of mankind or of life. Sitting huddled up, one knee in his hand, he made no further movement, but at times a dry cough shook his breast.

'It 's Edgar,' said the small girl. 'He is for sale, you know.'

But the old book-lover, who had come armed with anger and resentment, thinking to find a cynical enemy, a monster of malice, an antibibliophile, stopped short, surprised, saddened, and overcome, before this little being devoid of strength and joy and hope.

Recognizing his mistake, troubled by the almost human face which sorrow and suffering made more human still, he murmured, 'Forgive me,' and bowed his head.

IV

Which in its forceful brevity projects us to the limits of the actual world.

Two months elapsed; the domestic upheaval did not subside, and Monsieur Sariette's thoughts turned to the Freemasons. The papers he read were full of their crimes. Abbé Patouille deemed them capable of the darkest deeds, and believed them to be in league with the Jews and meditating the total overthrow of Christendom.

Having now arrived at the acme of power, they wielded a dominating influence in all the principal departments of State, they ruled the Chambers, there were five of them in the Ministry, and they filled the Élysée. Having some time since assassinated a President of the Republic because he was a patriot, they were getting rid of the accomplices and witnesses of their execrable crime. Few days passed without Paris being terror-stricken at some mysterious murder hatched in their lodges. These were facts concerning which no doubt was possible. By what means did they gain access to the library? Monsieur Sariette could not imagine. What task had they come to fulfil? Why did they attack sacred antiquity and the origins of the Church? What impious designs were they forming? A heavy shadow hung over these terrible undertakings. The Catholic archivist, feeling himself under the eye of the sons of Hiram, was terrified and fell ill.

Scarcely had he recovered, when he resolved to pass the night in the very spot where these terrible mysteries were enacted, and to take the subtle and dangerous visitors by surprise. It was an enterprise that demanded all his slender courage. Being a man of delicate physique and of nervous temperament, Monsieur Sariette was naturally inclined to be fearful. On the 8th of January at nine o'clock in the evening, while the city lay asleep under a whirling snowstorm, he built up a good fire in the room containing the busts of the ancient poets and philosophers, and ensconced himself in an arm-chair at the chimney corner, a rug over his knees. On a small stand within reach of his hand were a lamp, a bowl of black coffee, and

a revolver borrowed from the youthful Maurice. He tried to read his paper, *La Croix*, but the letters danced beneath his eyes. So he stared hard in front of him, saw nothing but the shadows, heard nothing but the wind, and fell asleep.

When he awoke the fire was out, the lamp was extinguished, leaving an acrid smell behind. But all around, the darkness was filled with milky brightness and phosphorescent lights. He thought he saw something flutter on the table. Stricken to the marrow with cold and terror, but upheld by a resolve stronger than any fear, he rose, approached the table, and passed his hands over the cloth. He saw nothing; even the lights faded, but under his fingers he felt a folio wide open; he tried to close it, the book resisted, jumped up, and hit the imprudent librarian three blows on the head.

Monsieur Sariette fell down unconscious. . . .

Since then things had gone from bad to worse. Books left their allotted shelves in greater profusion than ever, and sometimes it was impossible to replace them, they disappeared. Monsieur Sariette discovered fresh losses daily. The Bollandists were now an imperfect set, thirty volumes of exegesis were missing. He himself had become unrecognizable. His face had shrunk to the size of one's fist and grown yellow as a lemon, his neck was elongated out of all proportion, his shoulders drooped, the clothes he wore hung on him as on a peg. He ate nothing, and at the Crémerie des Quatre Évêques he would sit with dull eyes and bowed head, staring fixedly and vacantly at the saucer where, in a muddy juice, floated his stewed prunes. He did not hear old Guinardon relate how he had at last begun to restore the Delacroix paintings at St Sulpice.

Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, when he heard the unhappy curator's alarming reports, used to answer dryly:

'These books have been mislaid, they are not lost; look carefully, Monsieur Sariette, look carefully and you will find them.'

And he murmured behind the old man's back:

'Poor old Sariette is in a bad way.'

'I think,' replied Abbé Patouille, 'that his brain is going.'

V

Wherein everything seems strange because everything is logical.

THE Chapel of the Holy Angels, which lies on the right hand as you enter the church of St Sulpice, was hidden behind a scaffolding of planks. Abbé Patouille, Monsieur Gaétan, Monsieur Maurice, his nephew, and Monsieur Sariette, entered in single file through the low door cut in the wooden hoarding, and found old Guinardon on the top of his ladder standing in front of the 'Heliodorus.' The old artist, surrounded by all sorts of tools and materials, was putting a white paste in the crack which cut in two the High Priest Onias. Zéphyrine, Paul Baudry's favourite model, Zéphyrine, who had lent her golden hair and polished shoulders to so many Magdalens, Marguerites, sylphs, and undines, and who, it is said, was beloved of the Emperor Napoleon III, was standing at the foot of the ladder with tangled locks, cadaverous cheeks, and dim eyes, older than old Guinardon, whose life she had shared for more than half a century. She had brought the painter's lunch in a basket.

Although the slanting rays fell grey and cold through the leaded and iron-barred window, Delacroix's colouring shone resplendent, and the roses on the cheeks of men and angels dimmed with their glorious beauty the rubicund countenance of old Guinardon, which stood out in relief against one of the temple's columns. These frescoes of the Chapel of the Holy Angels, though derided and insulted when they first appeared, have now become part of the classic tradition, and are united in immortality with the masterpieces of Rubens and Tintoretto.

Old Guinardon, bearded and long-haired, looked like Father Time effacing the works of man's genius. Gaétan, in alarm, called out to him:

'Carefully, Monsieur Guinardon, carefully. Do not scrape too much.'

The painter reassured him.

'Fear nothing, Monsieur Gaétan. I do not paint in that style. My art is a higher one. I work after the

manner of Cimabue, Giotto, and Beato Angelico, not in the style of Delacroix. This surface here is too heavily charged with contrast and opposition to give a really sacred effect. It is true that Chenavard said that Christianity loves the picturesque, but Chenavard was a rascal with neither faith nor principle—an infidel. . . . Look, Monsieur d'Esparvieu, I fill up the crevice, I re-lay the scales of paint which are peeling. That is all. . . . The damage, due to the sinking of the wall, or more probably to a seismic shock, is confined to a very small place. This painting of oil and wax applied on a very dry foundation is more solid than one might think.

'I saw Delacroix engaged on this work. Impassioned but anxious, he modelled feverishly, scraped out, repainted unceasingly; his mighty hand made childish blunders; the thing is done with the mastery of a genius and the inexperience of a schoolboy. It is a marvel how it holds.'

The good man was silent, and went on filling in the crevice.

'How classic and traditional the composition is,' said Gaétan. 'Time was when one could recognize nothing but its amazing novelty; now one can see in it a multitude of old Italian formulas.'

'I may allow myself the luxury of being just, I possess the qualifications,' said the old man from the top of his lofty ladder. 'Delacroix lived in a blasphemous and godless age. A painter of the decadence, he was not without pride nor grandeur. He was greater than his times. But he lacked faith, single-heartedness, and purity. To be able to see and paint angels he needed that virtue of angels and primitives, that supreme virtue which, with God's help, I do my best to practise, chastity.'

'Hold your tongue, Michel; you are as big a brute as any of them.

Thus Zéphyrine, devoured with jealousy because that very morning on the stairs she had seen her lover kiss the bread-woman's daughter, to wit the youthful Octavie, who was as squalid and radiant as one of Rembrandt's Brides. She had loved Michel madly in the happy days

long since past, and love had never died out in Zéphyrine's heart.

Old Guinardon received the flattering insult with a smile that he dissembled, and raised his eyes to the ceiling, where the archangel Michael, terrible in azure cuirass and gilt helmet, was springing heavenwards in all the radiance of his glory.

Meanwhile Abbé Patouille, blinking, and shielding his eyes with his hat against the glaring light from the window, began to examine the pictures one after another: Heliodorus being scourged by the angels, St Michael vanquishing the demons, and the combat of Jacob and the angel.

'All this is exceedingly fine,' he murmured at last, 'but why has the artist only represented wrathful angels on these walls? Look where I will in this chapel, I see but heralds of celestial anger, ministers of divine vengeance. God wishes to be feared; He wishes also to be loved. I would fain perceive on these walls messengers of peace and of clemency. I should like to see the seraph who purified the lips of the prophet; St Raphael, who gave back his sight to old Tobias; Gabriel, who announced the Mystery of the Incarnation to Mary; the angel who delivered St Peter from his chains; the cherubim who bore the dead St Catherine to the top of Sinai. Above all, I should like to be able to contemplate those heavenly guardians whom God gives to every man baptized in His name. We each have one who follows all our steps, who comforts us and upholds us. It would be pleasant indeed to admire these enchanting spirits, these beautiful faces.'

'Ah, Abbé! It depends on the point of view,' answered Gaétan. 'Delacroix was no sentimentalist. Old Ingres was not very far wrong in saying that this great man's work reeks of fire and brimstone. Look at the sombre, splendid beauty of those angels, look at those androgynes so proud and fierce, at those pitiless youths who lift avenging rods against Heliodorus, note that mysterious young wrestler touching the patriarch on the hip. . . .'

'Hush,' said Abbé Patouille. 'According to the Bible he is no angel like the others; if he be an angel, he is the Angel of Creation, the Eternal Son of God. I am sur-

prised that the venerable curé of St Sulpice, who entrusted the decoration of this chapel to Monsieur Eugène Delacroix, did not tell him that the patriarch's symbolic struggle with Him who did not tell His name took place in profound darkness, and that the subject is quite out of place here, since it prefigures the Incarnation of Jesus Christ. The best artists go astray when they fail to obtain their ideas of Christian iconography from a qualified ecclesiastic. The institutions of Christian art form the subject of numerous works with which you are doubtless acquainted, Monsieur Sariette.'

Monsieur Sariette was gazing vacantly about him. It was the third morning after his adventurous night in the library. Being, however, thus called upon by the venerable ecclesiastic, he pulled himself together and replied:

'On this subject we may with advantage consult Molanus, *De Historia Sacrarum Imaginum et Picturarum*, in the edition issued by Noel Paquot, dated Louvain, 1771; Cardinal Federico Borromeo, *De Pictura Sacra*, and the *Iconography* of Didron; but this last work must be read with caution.'

Having thus spoken, Monsieur Sariette relapsed into silence. He was pondering on his devastated library.

'On the other hand,' continued Abbé Patouille, 'since an example of the holy anger of the angels was necessary in this chapel, the painter is to be commended for having depicted for us in imitation of Raphael the heavenly messengers who chastised Heliodorus. Ordered by Seleucus, King of Syria, to carry off the treasures contained in the temple, Heliodorus was struck by an angel in a cuirass of gold mounted on a magnificently caparisoned steed. Two other angels smote him with rods. He fell to earth, as Monsieur Delacroix shows us here, and was swallowed up in darkness. It is right and salutary that this adventure should be cited as an example to the Republican Commissioners of Police and to the sacrilegious agents of the law. There will always be Heliodoruses, but, let it be known, every time they lay their hands on the property of the Church, which is the property of the poor, they shall be chastised with rods and blinded by the angels.

'I should like this painting, or, better still, Raphael's sublimer conception of the same subject, to be engraved in little pictures fully coloured, and distributed as rewards in all the schools.'

'Uncle,' said young Maurice, with a yawn, 'I think these things are simply ghastly. I prefer Matisse and Metzinger.'

These words fell unheeded, and old Guinardon held forth from his ladder:

'Only the Primitives caught a glimpse of heaven. Beauty is only to be found between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries. The antique, the impure antique, which regained its pernicious influence over the minds of the sixteenth century, inspired poets and painters with criminal notions and immodest conceptions, with horrid impurities, filth. All the artists of the Renaissance were swine, including Michael Angelo.'

Then, perceiving that Gaétan was on the point of departure, old Guinardon assumed an air of *bonhomie*, and said to him in a confidential tone:

'Monsieur Gaétan, if you 're not afraid of climbing up my five flights, come and have a look at my den. I 've got two or three little canvases I wouldn't mind parting with, and they might interest you. All good, honest, straightforward stuff. I 'll show you, among other things, a tasty, spicy little Baudouin that would make your mouth water.'

At this speech Gaétan made off. As he descended the church steps and turned down the rue Princesse, he found himself accompanied by old Sariette, and fell to unburdening himself to him, as he would have done to any human creature, or indeed to a tree, a lamp-post, a dog, or his own shadow, of the indignation with which the aesthetic theories of the old painter inspired him.

'Old Guinardon overdoes it with his Christian art and his Primitives! Whatever the artist conceives of heaven is borrowed from earth; God, the Virgin, the angels, men and women, saints, the light, the clouds. When he was designing figures for the chapel windows at Dreux, old Ingres drew from life a pure, fine study of a woman, which may be seen, among many others, in the Musée Bonnat at Bayonne. Old Ingres has written at the bottom

of the page in case he should forget: "Mademoiselle Cécile, admirable legs and thighs." And so as to make Mademoiselle Cécile into a saint in paradise, he gave her a robe, a cloak, a veil, inflicting thus a shameful decline in her estate, for the tissues of Lyons and Genoa are worthless compared with the youthful living tissue, rosy with pure blood; the most beautiful draperies are despicable compared with the lines of a beautiful body. In fact, clothing for flesh that is desirable and ripe for wedlock is an unmerited shame, and the worst of humiliations.' And Gaétan, walking carelessly in the gutter of the rue Garancière, continued: 'Old Guinardon is a pestilential idiot. He blasphemes antiquity, sacred antiquity, the age when the gods were kind. He exalts an epoch when the painter and the sculptor had all their lessons to learn over again. In point of fact, Christianity has run contrary to art insomuch as it has not favoured the study of the nude. Art is the representation of nature, and nature is pre-eminently the human body; it is the nude.'

'Pardon, pardon,' murmured old Sariette. 'There is such a thing as spiritual, or, as one might term it, inward beauty, which, since the days of Fra Angelico down to those of Hippolyte Flandrin, Christian art has——'

But Gaétan, never hearing a word of all this, went on hurling his impetuous observations at the stones of the old street and the snow-laden clouds overhead:

'The Primitives cannot be judged as a whole, for they are utterly unlike each other. This old madman confounds them all together. Cimabue is a corrupt Byzantine; Giotto gives hints of powerful genius, but his modelling is bad, and, like children, he gives all his characters the same face. The early Italians have grace and joy, because they are Italians. The Venetians have an instinct for fine colour. But when all is said and done these exquisite craftsmen enamel and gild rather than paint. There is far too much softness about the heart and the palette of your saintly Angelico for me. As for the Flemish school, that 's quite another pair of shoes. They can use their hands, and in glory of workmanship they are on a level with the Chinese lacquer workers. The technique of the brothers Van

Eyck is a marvel, but I cannot discover in their 'Adoration of the Lamb' the charm and mystery that some have vaunted. Everything in it is treated with a pitiless perfection, it is vulgar in feeling and cruelly ugly. Memling may touch one perhaps; but he creates nothing but sick wretches and cripples; under the heavy, rich, and ungraceful robes of his virgins and saints one divines some very lamentable anatomy. I did not wait for Roger van der Weyden to call himself Roger de la Pasture and turn Frenchman in order to prefer him to Memling. This Rogier or Roger is less of a ninny; but then he is more lugubrious, and the rigidity of his lines bears eloquent testimony to his poverty-stricken figures. It is a strange perversion to take pleasure in these carnivalesque figures when one can have the paintings of Leonardo, Titian, Correggio, Velasquez, Rubens, Rembrandt, Poussin, or Prud'hon. Really it is a perverted instinct.'

Meanwhile the Abbé Patouille and Maurice d'Esparvieu were strolling leisurely along in the wake of the aesthete and the librarian. As a general rule the Abbé Patouille was little inclined to talk theology with laymen, or, for that matter, with clerics either. Carried away, however, by the attractiveness of the subject, he was telling the youthful Maurice all about the sacred mission of those guardian angels which Monsieur Delacroix had so inopportunely excluded from his pictures. And in order to give more adequate expression to his thoughts on such lofty themes, the Abbé Patouille borrowed whole phrases and sentences from Bossuet. He had got them up by heart to put in his sermons, for he adhered strongly to tradition.

'Yes, my son,' he was saying, 'God has appointed tutelary spirits to be near us. They come to us laden with His gifts. They return laden with our prayers. Such is their task. Not an hour, not a moment passes but they are at our side, ready to help us, ever fervent and unwearying guardians, watchmen that never slumber.'

'Quite so, Abbé,' murmured Maurice, who was wondering by what cunning artifice he could get on the soft side of his mother and persuade her to give him some money of which he was urgently in need.

VI

Wherein Père Sariette discovers his missing treasures.

NEXT morning Monsieur Sariette entered Monsieur René d'Esparvieu's study without knocking. He raised his arms to the heavens, his few hairs were standing straight up on his head. His eyes were big with terror. In husky tones he stammered out the dreadful news. A very old manuscript of Flavius Josephus; sixty volumes of all sizes; a priceless jewel, namely, a Lucretius adorned with the arms of Philippe de Vendôme, Grand Prior of France, with notes in Voltaire's own hand; a manuscript of Richard Simon, and Gassendi's correspondence with Gabriel Naudé, comprising two hundred and thirty-eight unpublished letters, had disappeared. This time the owner of the library was alarmed.

He mounted in haste to the abode of the philosophers and the globes, and there with his own eyes confirmed the magnitude of the disaster.

There were yawning gaps on many a shelf. He searched here and there, opened cupboards, dragged out brooms, dusters, and fire-extinguishers, rattled the shovel in the coke fire, shook out Monsieur Sariette's best frock coat that was hanging in the cloak room, and then stood and gazed disconsolately at the empty places left by the Gassendi portfolios.

For the past half-century the whole learned world had been loudly clamouring for the publication of this correspondence. Monsieur René d'Esparvieu had not responded to the universal desire, unwilling either to assume so heavy a task, or to resign it to others. Having found much boldness of thought in these letters, and many passages of more libertine tendency than the piety of the twentieth century could endure, he preferred that they should remain unpublished; but he felt himself responsible for their safe keeping, not only to his country, but to the whole civilized world.

'How can you have allowed yourself to be robbed of such a treasure?' he asked severely of Monsieur Sariette.

'How can I have allowed myself to be robbed of such a treasure?' repeated the unhappy librarian. 'Monsieur, if you opened my breast, you would find that question engraved upon my heart.'

Unmoved by this powerful utterance, Monsieur d'Esparvieu continued with pent-up fury:

'And you have discovered no single sign that would put you on the track of the thief, Monsieur Sariette? You have no suspicion, not the faintest idea, of the way these things have come to pass? You have seen nothing, heard nothing, noticed nothing, learnt nothing? You must grant this is unbelievable. Think, Monsieur Sariette, think of the possible consequences of this unheard-of theft, committed under your eyes. A document of inestimable value in the history of the human mind disappears. Who has stolen it? Why has it been stolen? Who will gain by it? Those who have got possession of it doubtless know that they will be unable to dispose of it in France. They will go and sell it in America or Germany. Germany is greedy for such literary monuments. Should the correspondence of Gassendi with Gabriel Naudé go over to Berlin, if it is published there by German savants, what a disaster, nay, what a scandal! Monsieur Sariette, have you not thought of that?'

Beneath the stroke of an accusation all the more cruel in that he brought it against himself, Monsieur Sariette stood stupefied, and was silent. And Monsieur d'Esparvieu continued to overwhelm him with bitter reproaches.

'And you make no effort. You devise nothing to find these inestimable treasures. Make inquiries, bestir yourself, Monsieur Sariette; use your wits. It is well worth while.'

And Monsieur d'Esparvieu went out, throwing an icy glance at his librarian.

Monsieur Sariette sought the lost books and manuscripts in every spot where he had already sought them a hundred times, and where they could not possibly be. He even looked in the coke box and under the leather seat of his arm-chair. When midday struck he mechanically went downstairs. At the foot of the stairs he met his old pupil

Maurice, with whom he exchanged a bow. But he only saw men and things as through a mist.

The broken-hearted curator had already reached the hall when Maurice called him back.

'Monsieur Sariette, while I think of it, do have the books removed that are choking up my summer-house.'

'What books, Maurice?'

'I could not tell you, Monsieur Sariette, but there are some in Hebrew, all worm-eaten, with a whole heap of old papers. They are in my way. You can't turn round in the passage.'

'Who took them there?'

'I 'm bothered if I know.'

And the young man rushed off to the dining-room, the luncheon gong having sounded quite a minute ago.

Monsieur Sariette tore away to the summer-house. Maurice had spoken the truth. About a hundred volumes were there, on tables, on chairs, even on the floor. When he saw them he was divided betwixt joy and fear, filled with amazement and anxiety. Happy in the finding of his lost treasure, dreading to lose it again, and completely overwhelmed with astonishment, the man of books alternately babbled like an infant and uttered the hoarse cries of a maniac. He recognized his Hebrew Bibles, his ancient Talmuds, his very old manuscript of Flavius Josephus, his portfolios of Gassendi's letters to Gabriel Naudé, and his richest jewel of all, to wit, Lucretius adorned with the arms of the Grand Prior of France, and with notes in Voltaire's own hand. He laughed, he cried, he kissed the morocco, the calf, the parchment, the vellum, even the wooden boards studded with nails.

As fast as Hippolyte, the manservant, returned with an armful to the library, Monsieur Sariette, with a trembling hand, restored them piously to their places.

VII

Of a somewhat lively interest, whereof the moral will, I hope, appeal greatly to my readers, since it can be expressed by this sorrowful query: 'Thought, whither dost thou lure me?' For it is a universally admitted truth that it is unhealthy to think and that true wisdom lies in not thinking at all.

ALL the books were now once more assembled in the pious keeping of Monsieur Sariette. But this happy reunion was not destined to last. The following night twenty volumes left their places, among them the Lucretius of Philippe de Vendôme. Within a week the old Hebrew and Greek texts had all returned to the summer-house, and every night during the ensuing month they left their shelves and secretly went on the same path. Others betook themselves no one knew whither.

On hearing of these mysterious occurrences, Monsieur René d'Esparvieu merely remarked with frigidity to his librarian:

'My poor Sariette, all this is very queer, very queer indeed.'

And when Monsieur Sariette tentatively advised him to lodge a formal complaint or to inform the Commissaire de Police, Monsieur d'Esparvieu cried out upon him:

'What are you suggesting, Monsieur Sariette? Divulge domestic secrets, make a scandal! You cannot mean it. I have enemies, and I am proud of it. I think I have deserved them. What I might complain about is that I am wounded in the house of my friend, attacked with unheard-of violence, by fervent Royalists, who, I grant you, are good Catholics, but exceedingly bad Christians. . . . In a word, I am watched, spied upon, shadowed, and you suggest, Monsieur Sariette, that I should make a present of this comic-opera mystery, this burlesque adventure, this story in which we both cut somewhat pitiable figures, to a set of spiteful journalists? Do you wish to cover me with ridicule?'

The result of the colloquy was that the two agreed to change all the locks in the library. Estimates were asked for and workmen called in. For six weeks the d'Espar-

vieu household rang from morning till night with the sound of hammers, the hum of centre-bits, and the grating of files. Fires were always going in the abode of the philosophers and globes, and the people of the house were simply sickened by the smell of heated oil. The old, smooth, easy-running locks were replaced on the cupboards and doors of the rooms by stubborn and tricky fastenings. There was nothing but combinations of locks, letter padlocks, safety bolts, bars, chains, and electric alarm bells.

All this display of ironmongery inspired fear. The lock cases glistened, and there was much grinding of bolts. To gain access to a room, a cupboard, or a drawer, it was necessary to know a certain number, of which Monsieur Sariette alone was cognizant. His head was filled with bizarre words and tremendous numbers, and he got entangled among all these cryptic signs, these square, cubic, and triangular numbers. He himself couldn't get the doors and the cupboards undone, yet every morning he found them wide open, and the books thrown about, ransacked, and hidden away. In the gutter of the rue Servandoni a policeman picked up a volume of Salomon Reinach on the identity of Barabbas and Jesus Christ. As it bore the bookplate of the d'Esparvieu library he returned it to the owner.

Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, not even deigning to inform Monsieur Sariette of the fact, made up his mind to consult a magistrate, a friend in whom he had complete confidence, to wit, a certain Monsieur des Aubels, counsel at the Law Courts, who had put through many an important affair. He was a little plump man, very red, very bald, with a cranium that shone like a billiard ball. He entered the library one morning feigning to come as a book lover, but he soon showed that he knew nothing about books. While all the busts of the ancient philosophers were reflected in his shining pate, he put divers insidious questions to Monsieur Sariette, who grew uncomfortable and turned red, for innocence is easily flustered. From that moment Monsieur des Aubels had a mighty suspicion that Monsieur Sariette was the perpetrator

of the very thefts he denounced with horror; and it immediately occurred to him to seek out the accomplices of the crime. As regards motives, he did not trouble about them, motives are always to be found. Monsieur des Aubels told Monsieur René d'Esparvieu that, if he liked, he would have the house secretly watched by a detective from the prefecture.

'I will see that you get Mignon,' he said. 'He is an excellent servant, assiduous and prudent.'

By six o'clock next morning Mignon was already walking up and down outside the d'Espervieus' house, his head sunk between his shoulders, wearing love-locks which showed from under the narrow brim of his bowler hat, his eye cocked over his shoulder. He wore an enormous dull-black moustache, his hands and feet were huge; in fact, his whole appearance was distinctly memorable. He paced regularly up and down from the nearest of the big rams'-head pillars which adorn the Hôtel de la Sordière to the end of the rue Garancière, towards the apse of St Sulpice Church and the dome of the Chapel of the Virgin.

Henceforth it became impossible to enter or leave the d'Esparvieus' house without feeling that one's every action, one's very thoughts, were being spied upon. Mignon was a prodigious person endowed with powers that nature denies to other mortals. He neither ate nor slept. At all hours of the day and night, in wind and rain, he was to be found outside the house, and no one escaped the X-rays of his eye. One felt pierced through and through, penetrated to the very marrow, worse than naked, bare as a skeleton. It was the affair of a moment; the detective did not even stop, but continued his everlasting walk. It became intolerable. Young Maurice threatened to leave the paternal roof if he was to be so radiographed. His mother and his sister Berthe complained of his piercing look; it offended the chaste modesty of their souls. Mademoiselle Caporal, young Léon d'Esparvieu's governess, felt an indescribable embarrassment. Monsieur René d'Esparvieu was sick of the whole business. He never crossed his own threshold without crushing his hat over his eyes to avoid the investigating ray and wishing old

Sariette, the *fons et origo* of all the evil, at the devil. The intimates of the household, such as Abbé Patouille and Uncle Gaétan, made themselves scarce; visitors gave up calling, tradespeople hesitated about leaving their goods, the carts belonging to the big shops scarcely dared stop. But it was among the domestics that the spying roused the most disorder.

The footman, afraid, under the eye of the police, to go and join the cobbler's wife over her solitary labours in the afternoon, found the house unbearable and gave notice. Odile, Madame d'Esparvieu's lady's-maid, not daring, as was her custom after her mistress had retired, to introduce Octave, the handsomest of the neighbouring bookseller's clerks, to her little room upstairs, grew melancholy, irritable, and nervous, pulled her mistress's hair while dressing it, spoke insolently, and made advances to Monsieur Maurice. The cook, Madame Malgoire, a serious matron of some fifty years, having no more visits from Auguste, the wine-merchant's man in the rue Servandoni, and being incapable of suffering a privation so contrary to her temperament, went mad, sent up a raw rabbit to table, and announced that the pope had asked her hand in marriage. At last, after a fortnight of superhuman assiduity, contrary to all known laws of organic life and to the essential conditions of animal economy, Mignon, the detective, having observed nothing abnormal, ceased his surveillance and withdrew without a word, refusing to accept a gratuity. In the library the dance of the books became livelier than ever.

'That is all right,' said Monsieur des Aubels. 'Since nothing comes in or goes out, the evil-doer must be in the house.'

The magistrate thought it possible to discover the criminal without police warrant or inquiry. On a date agreed upon, at midnight, he had the floor of the library, the treads of the stairs, the vestibule, the garden path leading to Monsieur Maurice's summer-house, and the entrance hall of the latter, all covered with a coating of talc.

The following morning Monsieur des Aubels, assisted by a photographer from the prefecture, and accompanied

by Monsieur René d'Esparvieu and Monsieur Sariette, came to take the imprints. They found nothing in the garden, the wind had blown away the coating of talc; nothing in the summer-house either. Young Maurice told them he thought it was some practical joke and that he had brushed away the white dust with the hearth brush. The real truth was, he had effaced the traces left by the boots of Odile, the lady's maid. On the stairs and in the library the very light print of a bare foot could be discerned, it seemed to have glided through the air and to have touched the ground at rare intervals and without any pressure. They discovered five of these traces. The clearest was to be found in the abode of the busts and spheres, on the edge of the table where the books were piled. The photographer took several negatives of this imprint.

'This is more terrifying than anything else,' murmured Monsieur Sariette.

Monsieur des Aubels did not hide his surprise.

Three days later the anthropometrical department of the prefecture returned the proofs exhibited to them, saying that they were not in the records.

After dinner Monsieur René showed the photographs to his brother Gaétan, who examined them with profound attention, and after a long silence exclaimed:

'No wonder they have not got this at the prefecture; it is the foot of a god or of an athlete of antiquity. The sole that made this impression is of a perfection unknown to our races and our climates. It exhibits toes of exquisite grace, and a divine heel.'

René d'Esparvieu cried out upon his brother for a madman.

'He is a poet,' sighed Madame d'Esparvieu.

'Uncle,' said Maurice, 'you 'll fall in love with this foot if you ever come across it.'

'Such was the fate of Vivant Denon, who accompanied Bonaparte to Egypt,' replied Gaétan. 'At Thebes in a tomb violated by the Arabs, Denon found the little foot of a mummy, of marvellous beauty, He contemplated it with extraordinary fervour. "It is the foot of a young woman," he pondered, "of a princess—of a charming

creature. No covering has ever marred its perfect shape." Denon admired, adored, and loved it. You may see a drawing of this little foot in Denon's atlas of his journey to Egypt, whose leaves one could turn over upstairs, without going further afield, if only Monsieur Sariette would ever let us see a single volume of his library.'

Sometimes, in bed, Maurice, waking in the middle of the night, thought he heard the sound of pages being turned over in the next room, and the thud of bound volumes falling on the floor.

One morning at five o'clock he was coming home from the club, after a night of bad luck, and while he stood outside the door of the summer-house, hunting in his pocket for his keys, his ears distinctly heard a voice sighing:

'Knowledge, whither dost thou lead me? Thought, whither dost thou lure me?'

But entering the two rooms he saw nothing, and told himself that his ears must have deceived him.

VIII

Which speaks of love, a subject which always give pleasure, for a tale without love is like beef without mustard, an insipid dish.

NOTHING ever astonished Maurice. He never sought to know the causes of things and dwelt tranquilly in the world of appearances. Not denying the eternal truth, he nevertheless followed vain things as his fancy led him.

Less addicted to sport and violent exercise than most young people of his generation, he followed unconsciously the old erotic traditions of his race. The French were ever the most gallant of men, and it were a pity they should lose this advantage. Maurice preserved it. He was in love with no woman, but, as St Augustine said, he loved to love. After paying the tribute that was rightly due to the imperishable beauty and secret arts of Madame de la Verdelière, he had enjoyed the impetuous caresses of a young singer called Luciole. At present he was joylessly experiencing the primitive perversity of Odile, his mother's maid, and the tearful adoration of the

beautiful Madame Boittier. And he felt a great void in his heart.

It chanced that one Wednesday, on entering the drawing-room where his mother entertained her friends — who were, generally speaking, unattractive and austere ladies, with a sprinkling of old men and very young people—he noticed, in this intimate circle, Madame des Aubels, the wife of the magistrate at the Law Courts, whom Monsieur d'Esparvieu had vainly consulted on the mysterious ransacking of his library. She was young, he found her pretty, and not without cause. Gilberte had been modelled by the genius of the species, and no other genius had had a part in the work.

Thus all her attributes inspired desire, and nothing in her shape or her being aroused any other sentiment.

The law of attraction which draws world to world moved young Maurice to approach this delicious creature, and under its influence he offered to escort her to the tea table. And when Gilberte was served with tea, he said:

'We should hit it off quite well together, you and I, don't you think?'

He spoke in this way, according to modern usage, so as to avoid inane compliments and to spare a woman the boredom of listening to one of those old declarations of love which, containing nothing but what is vague and undefined, require neither a truthful nor an exact reply.

And profiting by the fact that he had an opportunity of conversing secretly with Madame des Aubels for a few minutes, he spoke urgently and to the point. Gilberte, so far as one could judge, was made rather to awaken desire than to feel it. Nevertheless, she well knew that her fate was to love, and she followed it willingly and with pleasure. Maurice did not particularly displease her. She would have preferred him to be an orphan, for experience had taught her how disappointing it sometimes is to love the son of the house.

'Will you?' he said by way of conclusion.

She pretended not to understand, and with her little *foie-gras* sandwich raised half-way to her mouth she looked at Maurice with wondering eyes.

'Will I *what*?' she asked.

'You know quite well.'

Madame des Aubels lowered her eyes, and sipped her tea, for her prudishness was not quite vanquished. Meanwhile Maurice, taking her empty cup from her hand, murmured:

'Saturday, five o'clock, 126 rue de Rome, on the ground floor, the door on the right, under the arch. Knock three times.'

Madame des Aubels glanced severely and imperturbably at the son of the house, and with a self-possessed air rejoined the circle of highly respectable women to whom the Senator Monsieur Le Fol was explaining how artificial incubators were employed at the agricultural colony at Ste Julienne.

The following Saturday, Maurice, in his ground-floor flat, awaited Madame des Aubels. He awaited her in vain. No light hand came to knock three times on the door under the arch. And Maurice gave way to imprecations, inwardly calling the absent one a jade and a hussy. His fruitless wait, his frustrated desires, rendered him unjust. For Madame des Aubels in not coming where she had never promised to go hardly deserved these names; but we judge human actions by the pleasure or pain they cause us.

Maurice did not put in an appearance in his mother's drawing-room until a fortnight after the conversation at the tea table. He came late. Madame des Aubels had been there for half an hour. He bowed coldly to her, took a seat some way off, and affected to be listening to the talk.

'Worthily matched,' a rich male voice was saying; 'the two antagonists were well calculated to render the struggle a terrible and uncertain one. General Bol, with unprecedented tenacity, maintained his position as though he were rooted in the very soil. General Milpertuis, with an agility truly superhuman, kept carrying out movements of the most dazzling rapidity around his immovable adversary. The battle continued to be waged with terrible stubbornness. We were all in an agony of suspense. . . .'

It was General d'Esparvieu describing the autumn manœuvres to a company of breathlessly interested ladies. He was talking well and his audience were delighted.

Proceeding to draw a comparison between the French and German methods, he defined their distinguishing characteristics and brought out the conspicuous merits of both with a lofty impartiality. He did not hesitate to affirm that each system had its advantages, and at first made it appear to his circle of wondering, disappointed, and anxious dames, whose countenances were growing increasingly gloomy, that France and Germany were practically in a position of equality. But, little by little, as the strategist went on to give a clearer definition of the two methods, that of the French began to appear flexible, elegant, vigorous, full of grace, cleverness, and verve; that of the Germans heavy, clumsy, and undecided. And slowly and surely the faces of the ladies began to clear and to light up with joyous smiles. In order to dissipate any lingering shadows of misgiving from the minds of these wives, sisters, and sweethearts, the general gave them to understand that we were in a position to make use of the German method when it suited us, but that the Germans could not avail themselves of the French method. No sooner had he delivered himself of these sentiments than he was buttonholed by Monsieur le Truc de Ruffec, who was engaged in founding a patriotic society known as 'Swordsmen All,' of which the object was to regenerate France and ensure her superiority over all her adversaries. Even children in the cradle were to be enrolled, and Monsieur le Truc de Ruffec offered the honorary presidency to General d'Esparvieu.

Meanwhile Maurice was appearing to be interested in a conversation that was taking place between a very gentle old lady and the Abbé Lapetite, Chaplain to the Dames du Saint-Sang. The old lady, severely tried of late by illness and the loss of friends, wanted to know how it was that people were unhappy in this world.

'How,' she asked Abbé Lapetite, 'do you explain the scourges that afflict mankind? Why are there plagues, famines, floods, and earthquakes?'

'It is surely necessary that God should sometimes remind us of His existence,' replied Abbé Lapetite, with a heavenly smile.

Maurice appeared keenly interested in this conversation. Then he seemed fascinated by Madame Fillot-Grandin, quite a personable young woman, whose simple innocence, however, detracted all piquancy from her beauty, all savour from her bodily charms. A very sour, shrill-voiced old lady, who, affecting the dowdy, woollen weeds of poverty, displayed the pride of a great lady in the world of Christian finance, exclaimed in a squeaky voice:

'Well, my dear Madame d'Esparvieu, so you have had trouble here. The papers speak darkly of robbery, of thefts committed in Monsieur d'Esparvieu's valuable library, of stolen letters . . .'

'Oh,' said Madame d'Esparvieu, 'if we are to believe all the newspapers say . . .'

'Oh, so, dear madame, you have got your treasures back. All 's well that ends well.'

'The library is in perfect order,' asserted Madame d'Esparvieu. 'There is nothing missing.'

'The library is on the floor above this, is it not?' asked young Madame des Aubels, showing an unexpected interest in the books.

Madame d'Esparvieu replied that the library occupied the whole of the second floor, and that they had put the least valuable books in the attics.

'Could I not go and look at it?'

The mistress of the house declared that nothing could be easier. She called to her son:

'Maurice, go and do the honours of the library to Madame des Aubels.'

Maurice rose, and without uttering a word, mounted to the second floor in the wake of Madame des Aubels.

He appeared indifferent, but inwardly he rejoiced, for he had no doubt that Gilberte had feigned her ardent desire to inspect the library simply to see him in secret. And, while affecting indifference, he promised himself to renew those offers which, this time, would not be refused.

Under the romantic bust of Alexandre d'Esparvieu, they were met by the silent shadow of a little wan, hollow-eyed old man, who wore a settled expression of mnte terror.

'Do not let us disturb you, Monsieur Sariette,' said

Maurice. 'I am showing Madame des Aubels round the library.'

Maurice and Madame des Aubels passed on into the great room where against the four walls rose presses filled with books and surmounted by bronze busts of poets, philosophers, and orators of antiquity. All was in perfect order, an order which seemed never to have been disturbed from the beginning of things.

Only, a black void was to be seen in the place which, only the evening before, had been filled by an unpublished manuscript of Richard Simon. Meanwhile, by the side of the young couple walked Monsieur Sariette, pale, faded, and silent.

'Really and truly, you have not been nice,' said Maurice with a look of reproach at Madame des Aubels.

She signed to him that the librarian might overhear. But he reassured her.

'Take no notice. It is old Sariette. He has become a complete idiot.' And he repeated: 'No, you have not been at all nice. I awaited you. You did not come. You have made me unhappy.'

After a moment's silence, while one heard the low melancholy whistling of asthma in poor Sariette's bronchial tubes, young Maurice continued insistently:

'You are wrong.'

'Why wrong?'

'Wrong not to do as I ask you.'

'Do you still think so?'

'Certainly.'

'You meant it seriously?'

'As seriously as can be.'

Touched by his assurance of sincere and constant feeling, and thinking she had resisted sufficiently, Gilberte granted to Maurice what she had refused him a fortnight ago.

They slipped into an embrasure of the window, behind an enormous celestial globe whereon were graven the signs of the zodiac and the figures of the stars, and there, their gaze fixed on the Lion, the Virgin, and the Scales, in the presence of a multitude of Bibles, before the works of the Fathers, both Greek and Latin, beneath the casts of

Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Seneca, and Epictetus, they exchanged vows of love and a long kiss on the mouth.

Almost immediately Madame des Aubels bethought herself that she still had some calls to pay, and that she must make her escape quickly, for love had not made her lose all sense of her own importance. But she had barely crossed the landing with Maurice when they heard a hoarse cry and saw Monsieur Sariette plunge madly downstairs, exclaiming as he went:

'Stop it, stop it, I saw it fly away! It escaped from the shelf by itself. It crossed the room . . . there it is—there! It 's going downstairs. Stop it! It has gone out of the door on the ground floor!'

'What?' asked Maurice.

Monsieur Sariette looked out of the landing window, murmuring, horror-struck:

'It 's crossing the garden! It 's going into the summer-house. Stop it, stop it!'

'But what is it?' repeated Maurice—'in God's name, what is it?'

'My Flavius Josephus,' exclaimed Monsieur Sariette. 'Stop it!'

And he fell down unconscious.

'You see he is quite mad,' said Maurice to Madame des Aubels, as he lifted up the unfortunate librarian.

Gilberte, a little pale, said she also thought she had seen something in the direction indicated by the unhappy man, something flying.

Maurice had seen nothing, but he had felt what seemed like a gust of wind.

He left Monsieur Sariette in the arms of Hippolyte and the housekeeper, who had both hastened to the spot on hearing the noise.

The old gentleman had a wound in his head.

'All the better,' said the housekeeper; 'this wound may save him from having a fit.'

Madame des Aubels gave her handkerchief to stop the blood, and recommended an arnica compress.

IX

Wherein it is shown that, as an ancient Greek poet said, 'Nothing is sweeter than Aphrodite the Golden.'

ALTHOUGH he had enjoyed Madame des Aubels's favours for six whole months, Maurice still loved her. True, they had had to separate during the summer. For lack of funds of his own he had had to go to Switzerland with his mother, and then to stop with the whole family at the Château d'Esparvieu. She had spent the summer with her mother at Niort, and the autumn with her husband at a little Normandy seaside place, so that they had hardly seen each other four or five times. But since the winter, kindly to lovers, had brought them back to town again, Maurice had been receiving her twice a week in his little flat in the rue de Rome, and received no one else. No other woman had inspired him with feelings of such constancy and fidelity. What augmented his pleasure was that he believed himself loved, and indeed he was not unpleasing.

He thought that she did not deceive him, not that he had any reason to think so, but it appeared right and fitting that she should be content with him alone. What annoyed him was that she always kept him waiting, and was unpunctual in coming to their meeting-place; she was invariably late—at times very late.

Now on Saturday, 30th January, since four o'clock in the afternoon, Maurice had been awaiting Madame des Aubels in the little pink room, where a bright fire was burning. Gaily clad in a suit of flowered pyjamas, he was smoking Turkish cigarettes. At first he dreamt of receiving her with long kisses, with hitherto unknown caresses. A quarter of an hour having passed, he meditated serious and affectionate reproaches, then after an hour of disappointed waiting he vowed he would meet her with cold disdain.

At length she appeared, fresh and fragrant.

'It was scarcely worth while coming,' he said bitterly, as she laid her muff and her little bag on the table and untied her veil before the wardrobe mirror.

Never, she told her beloved, had she had such trouble

to get away. She was full of excuses, which he obstinately rejected. But no sooner had she the good sense to hold her tongue than he ceased his reproaches, and then nothing detracted from the longing with which she inspired him.

Born to please and charm, she undressed leisurely, as a woman who knows that it becomes her to be naked and is proper to show her beauty. He made love to her at first with the dark passion of a man beset by Necessity, mistress of men and the gods alike. Beneath a frail appearance, Gilberte was strong enough to suffer the blows of the inexorable goddess. Afterwards he loved her in a manner less fatalistic, according to the counsels of wise Venus and the ways of ingenious Eros. To his instinctive passion there was added the inventions of a lustful mind, as the vines entwined the staffs of the Bacchantes. Seeing that his play pleased her, he prolonged it, since it is in the nature of lovers to seek the satisfaction of the loved one. Then they both fell into a silent, voluptuous languor.

The curtains were drawn, the room was bathed in warm shadows lit by the dancing gleams of the fire. The mirrors in the wardrobe and on the chimney-piece shone with mysterious lights. Gilberte, leaning on her elbow, head on hand, was lost in thought. A little jeweller, a trustworthy and intelligent man, had shown her a wonderfully pretty pearl and sapphire bracelet; it was worth a great deal, and was to be had for a mere nothing. He had got it from a *cocotte* down on her luck, who was in a hurry to dispose of it. It was a rare chance, it would be a huge pity to let it slip.

'Would you like to see it, darling? I will ask the little man to let me have it to show you.'

Maurice did not actually decline the proposal. But it was clear that he took no interest in the wonderful bracelet. 'When small jewellers come across a great bargain, they keep it to themselves, and do not allow their customers to profit by it. Moreover, jewellery means nothing just now. Well-bred women have given up wearing it. Every one goes in for sport, and jewellery does not go with sport.'

Maurice spoke thus, contrary to truth, because, having given his mistress a fur coat, he was in no hurry to give her anything more. He was not stingy, but he was careful

with his money. His people did not give him a very large allowance, and his debts grew bigger every day. By satisfying the wishes of his inamorata too promptly he feared to arouse others still more pressing. The bargain seemed less wonderful to him than to Gilberte; besides, he liked to take the initiative in choosing his gifts. Above all, he thought that if he gave her too many presents he would be no longer sure of being loved for himself.

Madame des Aubels felt neither contempt nor surprise at this attitude; she was gentle and temperate, she knew men, and judged that one must take them as one found them, that for the most part they do not give very willingly, and that a woman should know how to make them give.

Suddenly a gas lamp was lighted in the street, and shone through the gaps in the curtains.

'Half-past six,' she said. 'We must be on the move.'

Pricked by the touch of time's fleeting wing, Maurice was conscious of reawakened desires and reanimated powers. A white and radiant offering, Gilberte, with her head thrown back, her eyes half closed, her lips apart, sunk in dreamy languor, was breathing slowly and placidly, when suddenly she started up with a cry of terror.

'What ever is that?'

'Stay still,' said Maurice, holding her back in his arms.

In his present mood, had the sky fallen it would not have troubled him. But in one bound she escaped from him. Crouching down, her eyes filled with terror, she was pointing with her finger at a figure which appeared in a corner of the room, between the fire-place and the wardrobe with the mirror. Then, unable to bear the sight, and nearly fainting, she hid her face in her hands.

X

Which far surpasses in audacity the imaginative flights of Dante and Milton.

MAURICE at length turned his head, saw the figure, and perceiving that it moved, was also frightened. Meanwhile, Gilberte was regaining her senses. She imagined that what she had seen was some mistress whom her lover

had hidden in the room. Inflamed with anger and disgust at the idea of such treachery, boiling with indignation, and glaring at her supposed rival, she exclaimed:

'A woman . . . a naked woman too! You bring me into a room where you allow your women to come, and when I arrive they have not had time to dress. And you reproach me with arriving late! Your impudence is beyond belief! Come, send the creature packing. If you wanted us both here together, you might at least have asked me whether it suited me. . . .'

Maurice, wide-eyed and groping for a revolver that had never been there, whispered in her ear:

'Be quiet . . . it is no woman. One can scarcely see, but it is more like a man.'

She put her hands over her eyes again and screamed harder than ever.

'A man! Where does he come from? A thief! An assassin! Help! Help! Kill him. . . . Maurice, kill him! Turn on the light. No, don't turn on the light. . . .'

She made a mental vow that should she escape from this danger she would burn a candle to the Blessed Virgin. Her teeth chattered.

The figure made a movement.

'Keep away!' cried Gilberte. 'Keep away!'

She offered the burglar all the money and jewels she had on the table if he would consent not to stir. Amid her surprise and terror the idea assailed her that her husband, dissembling his suspicions, had caused her to be followed, had posted witnesses, and had had recourse to the Commissaire de Police. In a flash she distinctly saw before her the long, painful future, the glaring scandal, the pretended disdain, the cowardly desertion of her friends, the just mockery of society, for it is indeed ridiculous to be found out. She saw the divorce, the loss of her position and of her rank. She saw the dreary and narrow existence with her mother, when no one would make love to her, for men avoid women who fail to give them the security of the married state. And all this, why? Why this ruin, this disaster? For a piece of folly, for a mere nothing. Thus in a lightning flash spoke the conscience of Gilberte des Aubels.

'Have no fear, madame,' said a very sweet voice.

Slightly reassured, she found strength to ask:

'Who are you?'

'I am an angel,' replied the voice.

'What did you say?'

'I am an angel. I am Maurice's guardian angel.'

'Say it again. I am going mad. I do not understand. . . .'

Maurice, without understanding either, was indignant. Having readjusted his pyjamas, he sprang out of bed and showed himself bedecked with flowers; with his right hand armed with a slipper he made a threatening gesture, and said in a rough voice:

'You are a low ruffian; oblige me by going the way you came.'

'Maurice d'Esparvieu,' continued the sweet voice, 'He whom you adore as your Creator has stationed by the side of each of the faithful a good angel, whose mission it is to counsel and protect him; it is the invariable opinion of the Fathers, it is founded on many passages in the Bible, the Church admits it unanimously, without, however, pronouncing anathema upon those who hold a contrary opinion. You see before you one of these angels, yours, Maurice. I was commanded to watch over your innocence and to guard your chastity.'

'That may be,' said Maurice; 'but you are certainly no gentleman. A gentleman would not permit himself to enter a room at such a moment. To be plain, what the deuce are you doing here?'

'I have assumed this appearance, Maurice, because, having henceforth to move among mankind, I have to make myself like them. The celestial spirits possess the power of assuming a form which renders them apparent to the eye and to the touch. This shape is real, because it is apparent, and all the realities in the world are but appearances.'

Gilberte, pacified at length, was arranging her hair on her forehead.

The Angel pursued:

'The celestial spirits adopt, according to their fancy, one sex or the other, or both at once. But they cannot dis-

guise themselves at any moment, according to their caprice or fantasy. Their metamorphoses are subject to constant laws, which you would not understand. Thus I have neither desire nor power to transform myself under your eyes, for your amusement or my own, into a lion, a tiger, a fly, or into a sycamore shaving like the young Egyptian whose story was found in a tomb. I cannot change myself into an ass as did Lucius with the pomade of the youthful Photis. For in my wisdom I had fixed beforehand the hour of my apparition to mankind; nothing could hasten or delay it.'

Impatient for enlightenment, Maurice asked for the second time:

'Still, what are you up to here?'

Joining her voice to his, Madame des Aubels asked: 'Yes, indeed, what are you doing here?'

The Angel replied:

'Man, lend your ear. Woman, hear my voice. I am about to reveal to you a secret on which hangs the fate of the universe. In rebellion against Him whom you hold to be the Creator of all things visible and invisible, I am preparing the revolt of the angels.'

'Do not jest,' said Maurice, who had faith and did not allow holy things to be played with.

But the Angel answered reproachfully: 'What makes you think, Maurice, that I am frivolous and given to vain words?'

'Come, come, said Maurice, shrugging his shoulders. 'You are not going to revolt against——'

He pointed to the ceiling—not daring to finish.

But the Angel continued:

'Do you not know that the sons of God have already revolted and that a great battle took place in the heavens?'

'That was a long time ago,' said Maurice, putting on his socks.

Then the Angel replied:

'It was before the creation of the world. But nothing has changed since then in the heavens. The nature of the angels is no different now from what it was originally. What they did then they could do again now.'

'No! It is not possible. It is contrary to faith. If you were an angel, a good angel as you make out you are, it would never occur to you to disobey your Creator.'

'You are in error, Maurice, and the authority of the Fathers condemns you. Origen lays it down in his homilies that good angels are fallible, that they sin every day and fall from heaven like flies. Possibly you may be tempted to reject the authority of this Father, despite his knowledge of the Scriptures, because he is excluded from the canon of the saints. If this be so, I would remind you of the second chapter of Revelation, in which the Angels of Ephesus and Pergamos are rebuked for that they kept not ward over their church. You will doubtless contend that the angels to whom the apostle here refers are, properly speaking, the bishops of the two cities in question, and that he calls them angels on account of their ministry. It may be so, and I cede the point. But with what arguments, Maurice, would you counter the opinion of all those doctors and pontiffs whose unanimous teaching it is that angels may fall from good into evil? Such is the statement made by Saint Jerome in his *Epistle to Damasus*——'

'Monsieur,' said Madame des Aubels, 'go away, I beg you.'

But the Angel hearkened not, and continued:

'—Saint Augustine, in his *True Religion*, Chapter XIII; Saint Gregory, in his *Morals*, Chapter XXIV; Isidore——'

'Monsieur, let me get my things on; I am in a hurry.'

'—in his treatise on *The Greatest Good*, Book I, Chapter XII; Bede, *On Job*——'

'Oh, please, monsieur——'

'—Chapter VIII; John of Damascus, *Of Faith*, Book II, Chapter III. Those, I think, are sufficiently weighty authorities, and there is nothing for it, Maurice, but to admit your error. What has led you astray is that you have not duly considered my nature, which is free, active, and mobile, like that of all the angels, and that you have merely observed the grace and felicity with which you deem me so richly endowed. Lucifer possessed no less, yet he rebelled.'

'But what on earth are you rebelling for?' asked Maurice.

'Isaiah,' answered the child of light, 'Isaiah has already

asked, before you: "Quomodo cecidisti de coelo, Lucifer, qui mane oriebaris?" Hearken, Maurice. Before time was, the angels rose up to win dominion over heaven. The most beautiful of the seraphim revolted through pride. As for me, it is science that has inspired me with the generous desire for freedom. Finding myself near you, Maurice, in a house containing one of the vastest libraries in the world, I acquired a taste for reading and a love of study. While, fordone with the toils of a sensual life, you lay sunk in heavy slumber, I surrounded myself with books, I studied, I pondered over their pages, sometimes in one of the rooms of the library, under the busts of the great men of antiquity, sometimes at the far end of the garden, in the room in the summer-house next to your own.'

On hearing these words, young d'Esparvieu exploded with laughter and beat the pillow with his fist, an infallible sign of uncontrollable mirth.

'Ha ha ha! It was you who pillaged papa's library and drove poor old Sariette off his head! You know, he has become completely idiotic.'

'Busily engaged,' continued the Angel, 'in cultivating for myself a sovereign intelligence, I paid no heed to that inferior being, and when he thought to offer obstacles to my researches and to disturb my work I punished him for his importunity.

'One particular winter's night in the abode of the philosophers and globes I let fall on his head a volume of great weight, which he tried to tear from my invisible hand. Then more recently, raising, with a vigorous arm composed of a column of condensed air, a precious manuscript of Flavius Josephus, I gave the imbecile such a fright, that he rushed out screaming on to the landing and (to borrow a striking expression from Dante Alighieri) fell even as a dead body falls. He was well rewarded, for you gave him, madame, to staunch the blood from his wound, your little scented handkerchief. It was the day, you may remember, when behind a celestial globe you exchanged a kiss on the mouth with Maurice.'

'Monsieur,' said Madame des Aubels, with a frown, 'I cannot allow you . . .'

But she stopped short, deeming it was an inopportune moment to appear over-exacting on a matter of decorum.

'I had made up my mind,' continued the Angel impassively, 'to examine the foundations of belief. I first attacked the monuments of Judaism, and I read all the Hebrew texts.'

'You know Hebrew, then?' exclaimed Maurice.

'Hebrew is my native tongue: in paradise for a long time we have spoken nothing else.'

'Ah, you are a Jew. I might have deduced it from your want of tact.'

The Angel, not deigning to hear, continued in his melodious voice: 'I have delved deep into oriental antiquities and also into those of Greece and Rome. I have devoured the works of theologians, philosophers, physicists, geologists, and naturalists. I have learnt. I have thought. I have lost my faith.'

'What? You no longer believe in God?'

'I believe in Him, since my existence depends on His, and if He should fail to exist, I myself should fall into nothingness. I believe in Him, even as the satyrs and the maenads believed in Dionysus, and for the same reason. I believe in the God of the Jews and the Christians. But I deny that He created the world; at the most He organized but an inferior part of it, and all that He touched bears the mark of His rough and unforeseeing touch. I do not think He is either eternal or infinite, for it is absurd to conceive of a being who is not bounded by space or time. I think Him limited, even very limited. I no longer believe Him to be the only God. For a long time He did not believe it Himself; in the beginning He was a polytheist; later, His pride and the flattery of His worshippers made Him a monotheist. His ideas have little connection; He is less powerful than He is thought to be. And, to speak candidly, He is not so much a god as a vain and ignorant demiurge. Those who, like myself, know His true nature, call Him Ialdabaoth.'

'What 's that you say?'

'Iadalbaoth.'

'Iadalbaoth? What 's that?'

'I have already told you. It is the demiurge whom, in your blindness, you adore as the one and only God.'

'You 're mad. I don't advise you to go and talk rubbish like that to Abbé Patouille.'

'I am not in the least sanguine, my dear Maurice, of piercing the dense night of your intellect. I merely tell you that I am going to engage Ialdabaoth in conflict with some hopes of victory.'

'Mark my words, you won't succeed.'

'Lucifer shook His throne, and the issue was for a moment in doubt.'

'What is your name?'

'Abdiel for the angels and saints, Arcade for mankind.'

'Well, my poor Arcade, I regret to see you going to the bad. But confess that you are jesting with us. I could at a pinch understand your leaving heaven for a woman. Love makes us commit the greatest follies. But you will never make me believe that you, who have seen God face to face, ultimately found the truth in old Sariette's musty books. No, you will never get me to believe that!'

'My dear Maurice, Lucifer was face to face with God, yet he refused to serve Him. As to the kind of truth one finds in books, it is a truth that enables us sometimes to discern what things are not, without ever enabling us to discover what they are. And this poor little truth has sufficed to prove to me that He in whom I blindly believed is not believable, and that men and angels have been deceived by the lies of Ialdabaoth.'

'There is no Ialdaboath. There is God. Come, Arcade, do the right thing. Renounce these follies, these impieties, disincarnate yourself, become once more a pure spirit, and resume your office of guardian angel. Return to duty. I forgive you, but do not let us see you again.'

'I should like to please you, Maurice. I feel a certain affection for you, for my heart is soft. But fate henceforth calls me elsewhere towards beings capable of thought and action.'

'Monsieur Arcade,' said Madame des Aubels, 'withdraw, I implore you. It makes me horribly shy to be in my chemise before two men. I assure you I am not accustomed to it.'

XI

Recounts in what manner the Angel, attired in the cast-off garments of a suicide, leaves the youthful Maurice without a heavenly guardian.

CURLED up on the bed, her polished knees shone in the shadow below her short, flimsy chemise; with her crossed arms covering her breasts, she left nothing to be seen but her plump round shoulders and her hopelessly dishevelled, tawny hair.

'Reassure yourself, madame,' replied the apparition, 'your position is not as risky as you say. You are not confronted with two men, but with one man and an angel.'

She examined the stranger with an eye which, piercing the gloom, was anxiously surveying a vague but by no means negligible indication, and asked:

'Monsieur, is it quite certain that you are an angel?'

The apparition prayed her to have no doubt about it, and gave some precise information as to his origin.

'There are three hierarchies of celestial spirits, each composed of nine choirs; the first comprises the Seraphim, Cherubim, and the Thrones; the second, the Dominations, the Virtues, and the Powers; the third, the Principalities, the Archangels, and the Angels properly so called. I belong to the ninth choir of the third hierarchy.'

Madames des Aubels, who had her reasons for doubting this, expressed at least one:

'You have no wings.'

'Why should I, madame? Am I bound to resemble the angels on your holy-water stoups? Those feathery oars that beat the waves of the air in rhythmic cadences are not always worn by the heavenly messengers on their shoulders. Cherubim may be apterous. That all too beautiful angelic pair who spent an anxious night in the house of Lot compassed about by an oriental horde—they had no wings! No, they appeared just like men and the dust of the road covered their feet, which the patriarch washed with pious hand. I would beg you to observe, madame, that according to the science of organic metamorphosis created by Lamarck and Darwin, the wings of birds have been suc-

cessively transformed into forefeet in the case of quadrupeds and into arms in the case of the Linnaean primates. And you may remember, Maurice, that by a rather annoying reversion to type, Miss Kate, your English nurse, who used to be so fond of giving you a whipping, had arms very like the pinions of a plucked fowl. One may say, then, that a being possessing both arms and wings is a monster, and belongs to the department of teratology. In paradise we have cherubim or kerûbs in the shape of winged bulls, but those are the clumsy inventions of an inartistic god. It is nevertheless true, quite true, that the Victories of the temple of Athena Nike on the Athenian acropolis are beautiful, and possess both arms and wings; it is also true that the Victory of Brescia is beautiful, with her outstretched arms and her long wings folded on her mighty loins. It is one of the miracles of Greek genius to have known how to create harmonious monsters. The Greeks never err. The moderns always.'

'Yet on the whole,' said Madame des Aubels, 'you have not the look of a pure spirit.'

'Nevertheless, I am one, madame, if ever there was one. And it ill becomes you, who have been baptized, to doubt it. Several of the Fathers, such as St Justin, Tertullian, Origen, and Clement of Alexandria, thought that the angels were not purely spiritual, but possessed a body formed of some subtle material. This opinion has been rejected by the Church; hence I am merely spirit. But what is spirit and what is matter? Formerly they were contrasted as being two opposites, and now your human science tends to reunite them as two aspects of the same thing. It teaches that everything proceeds from the ether and everything returns to it, that the same movement transforms the waves of air into stones and minerals, and that the atoms scattered throughout illimitable space, form, by the varying speed of their orbits, all the substance of this material world.'

But Madame des Aubels was not listening. She had something on her mind, and to put an end to her suspense, she asked:

'How long have you been here?'

'I came with Maurice.'

'Well—that 's a nice thing!' said she, shaking her head. But the Angel continued with heavenly serenity:

'Everything in the universe is circular, elliptical, or hyperbolic, and the same laws which rule the stars govern this grain of dust. In the original and native movement of its substance, my body is spiritual, but it may affect, as you perceive, this material state, by changing the rhythm of its elements.'

Having thus spoken he sat down in a chair on Madame des Aubels's black stockings.

A clock struck outside.

'Good heavens, seven o'clock!' exclaimed Gilberte. 'What am I to say to my husband? He thinks I am at that tea party in the rue de Rivoli. We are dining with the La Verdelières to-night. Go away immediately, Monsieur Arcade. I must get ready to go. I have not a second to lose.'

The Angel replied that he would have willingly obeyed Madame des Aubels had he been in a state to show himself decently in public, but that he could not dream of appearing out of doors without any clothes. 'Were I to walk naked in the street,' he added, 'I should offend a nation attached to its ancient habits, habits which it has never examined. They are the basis of all moral systems. Formerly,' he added, 'the angels, in revolt like myself, manifested themselves to Christians under grotesque and ridiculous appearances, black, horned, hairy, and cloven-footed. Pure stupidity! They were the laughing-stock of people of taste. They merely frightened old women and children, and met with no success.'

'It is true he cannot go out as he is,' said Madame des Aubels with justice.

Maurice tossed his pyjamas and his slippers to the celestial messenger. Regarded as outdoor habiliments they were not adequate. Gilberte pressed her lover to run at once in quest of other clothes. He proposed to go and get some from the concierge. She was violently opposed to this. It would, she said, be madly imprudent to drag the concierge into such an affair.

'Do you want them,' she exclaimed, 'to know that . . .'

She pointed to the Angel and was silent.

Young d'Esparvieu went out to seek a clothes shop.

Meanwhile, Gilberte, who could not delay any longer for fear of causing a horrible society scandal, turned on the light and dressed before the Angel. She did it without any awkwardness, for she knew how to adapt herself to circumstances; and she took it that in such an unheard-of encounter in which heaven and earth were mingled in unutterable confusion, it was permissible to retrench in modesty.

Moreover she knew that she possessed a good figure, and had garments as dainty as the fashion demanded. As the apparition's sense of delicacy would not permit him to don Maurice's pyjamas, Gilberte could not help observing by the lamp-light that her suspicions were well founded, and that angels have the same appearance as men. Curious to know if the appearance were real or imaginary she asked the child of light if angels were like monkeys, who, to win women, merely lack money.

'Yes, Gilberte,' replied Arcade, 'angels are capable of loving mortals. It is the teaching of the scriptures. It is said in the sixth chapter of Genesis: "When men became numerous on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful, and they took as wives all those which pleased them."'

'Good heavens,' cried Gilberte all at once, 'I shall never be able to fasten my dress, it hooks down the back.'

When Maurice entered the room he found the Angel on his knees tying the shoes of the woman taken in adultery.

Taking her muff and her bag off the table she said:

'I have not forgotten anything? No. Good-night, Monsieur Arcade. Good-night, Maurice. I shall not forget to-day.' And she vanished like a dream.

'Here,' said Maurice, throwing the Angel a bundle of clothes.

The young man, having seen some dismal rags lying among clarinets and clyster pipes in the window of a

second-hand shop, had bought for nineteen francs the cast-off suit of some wretched sable-clad mortal who had committed suicide. The Angel, with native majesty, took the garments and put them on. Worn by him, they took on an unexpected elegance. He took a step to the door.

'So you are leaving me,' said Maurice. 'It 's settled, then? I very much fear that, some day, you will bitterly regret this hasty action.'

'I must not look back. Adieu, Maurice.'

Maurice timidly slipped five louis into his hand.

'Adieu, Arcade.'

But when the Angel had passed through the door, and all that was to be seen of him in the doorway was his uplifted heel, Maurice called him back.

'Arcade! I never thought of it! I have no guardian angel now!'

'Quite true, Maurice, you have one no longer.'

'Then what will become of me? One must have a guardian angel. Tell me—are there not grave drawbacks—is there no danger in not having one?'

'Before replying, Maurice, I must ask you if you wish me to speak to you according to your belief, which formerly was my own, according to the teaching of the Church and the Catholic faith, or according to natural philosophy.'

'I don't care a straw for your natural philosophy. Answer me according to the religion I believe in, and which I profess, and in which I wish to live and die.'

'Very well, my dear Maurice. The loss of your guardian angel will probably deprive you of certain spiritual aids, of certain celestial graces. I am expressing to you the unvarying opinion of the Church on the matter. You will lack an assistance, a support, a consolation which would have guided and confirmed you in the way of salvation. You will have less strength to avoid sin, and, as it was, you hadn't much. In fact, in spiritual matters, you will be without strength and without joy. Adieu, Maurice; when you see Madame des Aubels, please remember me to her.'

'You are going?'

'Farewell.'

Arcade disappeared, and Maurice sat for a long time in the depths of an arm-chair with his head in his hands.

XII

Wherein it is set forth how the Angel Mirar, when bearing grace and consolation to those dwelling in the neighbourhood of the Champs Élysées in Paris, beheld a music-hall singer named Bouchotte and fell in love with her.

THROUGH streets filled with brown fog, pierced with white and yellow lights, where horses exhaled their smoking breath and motors radiated their rapid searchlights, the angel made his way, and, mingling with the black flood of foot-passengers which rolled unceasingly along, proceeded across the town from north to south till he came to the lonely boulevards on the left bank of the river. Not far from the old walls of Port-Royal, a small restaurant flings night by night athwart the pavement the clouded rays of its streaming windows. Coming to a halt there, Arcade entered a room full of warm, savoury odours, pleasing to the unfortunate beings faint with cold and hunger. Glancing round him he beheld Russian nihilists, Italian anarchists, refugees, conspirators, revolutionaries from every quarter of the globe, picturesque old faces with tumbled masses of hair and beard that swept downwards even as the torrent and the waterfall sweep over their rocky bed. There were young faces of virginal coldness, expressions sombre and wild, pale eyes of infinite sweetness, drawn faces, and, in a corner, there were two Russian women, one extremely lovely, the other hideous, but resembling each other in their indifference to ugliness and to beauty. But failing to find the face he sought, for there were no angels in the room, he sat down at a small vacant marble table.

Angels, when driven by hunger, eat as do the animals of this earth, and their food, transformed by digestive

heat, becomes one with their celestial substance. Seeing three angels under the oaks of Mamre, Abraham offered them cakes, kneaded by Sarah, a whole calf, butter, and milk, and they ate. Lot, on receiving two angels in his house, ordered unleavened bread to be baked, and they did eat. Arcade was given a tough beef-steak by a seedy waiter and he did eat. Nevertheless, his dreams were of the sweet leisure, of the repose, of the delightful studies he had quitted, of the heavy task he had undertaken, of the toil, the weariness, the perils which he would have to endure, and his soul was sad and his heart troubled.

As he was finishing his modest repast, a young man of poor appearance and thinly clad entered the room, and rapidly surveying the tables approached the angel and greeted him by the name of Abdiel, because he himself was a celestial spirit.

'I knew you would answer my call, Mirar,' replied Arcade, addressing his angelic brother in his turn by the name he formerly bore in heaven. But Mirar was remembered no more in heaven since he, an archangel, had left the service of God. He was called Théophile Belais on earth, and to earn his bread gave music lessons to small children in the day-time and at night played the violin in dancing saloons.

'It is you, dear Abdiel?' replied Théophile. 'So here we are reunited in this sad world. I am pleased to see you again. All the same I pity you, for we lead a hard life here.'

But Arcade answered:

'Friend, your exile draws to an end. I have great plans. I will confide them to you and associate you with them.'

And Maurice's guardian angel, having ordered two coffees, revealed his ideas and his projects to his companion: he told how, during his visit on earth he had abandoned himself to researches little practised by celestial spirits, and had studied theologies, cosmogonies, systems of the universe, theories of matter, modern essays on the transformation and loss of energy. Having, he explained, studied nature, he had found it in perpetual conflict with the teachings of the Master he served. This

Master, greedy of praise, whom he had for a long time adored, appeared to him now as an ignorant, stupid, and cruel tyrant. He had denied Him, blasphemed Him, and was burning to combat Him. His plan was to recommence the revolt of the angels. He wished for war, and hoped for victory.

'But,' he added, 'it is necessary above all to know our strength and that of our adversary.' And he asked if the enemies of Ialdabaoth were numerous and powerful on earth.

Théophile looked wonderingly at his brother. He appeared not to understand the questions addressed him.

'Dear compatriot,' he said, 'I came at your invitation because it was the invitation of an old comrade. But I do not know what you expect of me, and I fear I shall be unable to help you in anything. I take no hand in politics, neither do I stand forth as a reformer. I am not like you, a spirit in revolt, a free-thinker, a revolutionary. I remain faithful, in the depths of my soul, to the Celestial Creator. I still adore the Master I no longer serve, and I lament the days when shrouding myself with my wings I formed with the multitude of the children of light a wheel of flame around His throne of glory. Love, profane love, has alone separated me from God. I quitted heaven to follow a daughter of men. She was beautiful and sang in music-halls.'

They rose. Arcade accompanied Théophile, who was living at the other end of the town, at the corner of the boulevard Rochechouart and the rue de Steinkerque. While walking through the deserted streets he who loved the singer told his brother of his love and his sorrows.

His fall, which dated from two years back, had been sudden. Belonging to the eighth choir of the third hierarchy he was a bearer of grace to the faithful who are still to be found in large numbers in France, especially among the higher ranks of the officers of the army and navy.

'One summer night,' he said, 'as I was descending from heaven, to distribute consolations, the grace of perseverance and of good deaths to divers pious persons in the

neighbourhood of the Étoile, my eyes, although well accustomed to immortal light, were dazzled by the fiery flowers with which the Champs Élysées were sown. Great candelabra, under the trees, marking the entrances to cafés and restaurants, gave the foliage the precious glitter of an emerald. Long garlands of luminous pearl surrounded the open-air enclosures where a crowd of men and women sat closely packed listening to the sounds of a lively orchestra, whose strains reached my ears confusedly.

'The night was warm, my wings were beginning to grow tired. I descended into one of the concerts and sat down, invisible, among the audience. At this moment, a woman appeared on the stage, clad in a short spangled frock. Owing to the reflection of the footlights and the paint on her face all that was visible of the latter was the expression and the smile. Her body was supple and voluptuous.

'She sang and danced. . . . Arcade, I have always loved dancing and music, but this creature's thrilling voice and insidious movements created in me an uneasiness I had never known before. My colour came and went. My eyelids drooped, my tongue clove to my mouth. I could not leave the spot.'

And Théophile related, groaning, how, possessed by desire for this woman, he did not return to heaven again, but, taking the shape of a man, lived an earthly life, for it is written: 'In those days the sons of God saw that the daughters of men were beautiful.'

A fallen angel, having lost his innocence along with the vision of God, Théophile at heart still retained his simplicity of soul. Clad in rags, filched from the stall of a Jewish hawker, he went to seek the woman he loved. She was called Bouchotte, and lodged in a small house in Montmartre. He flung himself at her feet and told her she was adorable, that she sang delightfully, that he loved her madly, that, for her, he would renounce his family and his country, that he was a musician and had nothing to eat. Touched by such youthful ingenuousness, candour, poverty, and love, she fed, clothed, and loved him.

However, after long and painful struggles, he procured employment as a music-teacher, and made some money,

which he brought to his mistress, keeping nothing for himself. From that time forward she loved him no longer. She despised him for earning so little, and did not conceal her indifference, weariness, and disgust. She overwhelmed him with reproaches, irony, and abuse, in spite of which she kept him, for she had had experience of worse partners, and was used to domestic quarrels. For the rest, she led a busy, serious, and rather hard life as artist and woman. Théophile loved her as he had loved her the first night, and he suffered.

'She overworks herself,' he told his celestial brother, 'that is what makes her so hard to please, but I am certain she loves me. I hope soon to give her more comfort.'

And he spoke at length of an operetta at which he was working, and which he hoped to have brought out at a Paris theatre. A young poet had given him the libretto. It was the story of Aline, Queen of Golconda, after an eighteenth-century tale.

'I am strewing it profusely with melodies,' said Théophile, 'my music comes from my heart. My heart is an inexhaustible source of melody. Unfortunately nowadays people like recondite arrangements, difficult scoring. They accuse me of being too fluid, too limpid, of not imparting enough colour to my style, not aiming at stronger effects in harmony and more vigorous contrasts. Harmony, harmony! . . . No doubt it has its merits, but it does not appeal to the heart. It is melody which carries us away and ravishes us and brings smiles and tears to our eyes.' At these words he smiled and wept to himself. Then he continued with emotion:

'I am a fountain of melody. But the orchestration! there 's the rub! In paradise, you know, Arcade, in the matter of instruments, we only possess the harp, the psaltery, and the hydraulic organ.'

Arcade was only listening to him with half an ear. He was meditating plans which filled his soul and swelled his heart.

'Do you know any angels in revolt?' he asked his companion. 'As for me, I know only one, Prince Istar, with whom I have exchanged a few letters, and who offered to

share his attic with me while I was finding a lodging in this town, where I believe rents are very high.'

Of angels in revolt Théophile knew none. When he met a fallen spirit who had formerly been one of his comrades, he shook him by the hand, for he was a faithful friend. Sometimes he saw Prince Istar. But he avoided all those bad angels who shocked him by the violence of their opinions and whose conversations plagued him to death.

'Then you don't approve of me?' asked the impulsive Arcade.

'Friend, I neither approve of you nor blame you. I understand nothing of the ideas which trouble you. Neither do I think it good for an artist to concern himself with politics. One has quite sufficient to occupy oneself with one's art.'

He loved his profession, and had hopes of 'arriving' one day, but theatrical ways disgusted him. The only chance he saw of having his piece played was to take one or two—perhaps three—collaborators, who, without having done any work, would sign their names and share the profits. Soon Bouchotte would fail to find engagements. When she offered her services in some small hall the manager began by asking her how many shares she was taking in the business. Such customs, thought Théophile, were deplorable.

XIII

Wherein we hear the beautiful Archangel Zita unfold her lofty designs and are shown the wings of Mirar, all moth-eaten, in a cupboard.

THUS talking, the two archangels had reached the Boulevard Rochechouart. As his eye lighted on a tavern, whence, through the mist, the light fell golden on the pavement, Théophile suddenly bethought himself of the Archangel Ithuriel who, in the guise of a poor but beautiful woman, was living in wretched lodgings on La Butte, and came every evening to read the papers at this tavern. The musician often met her there. Her name was Zita.

Théophile had never been curious enough to inquire into the opinions entertained by this archangel, but it was generally supposed that she was a Russian nihilist, and he took her to be, like Arcade, an atheist and a revolutionary. He had heard remarkable tales about her. People said she was a hermaphrodite, and that as the active and passive principles were united within her in a condition of stable equilibrium, she was an example of a perfect being, finding in herself complete and continuous satisfaction, contented yet unfortunate in that she knew not desire.

'But,' added Théophile, 'I have my doubts about it. I believe she 's a woman and subject to love, like everything else that has life and breath in the universe. Besides, someone caught her one day kissing her hand to a strapping peasant fellow.'

He offered to introduce his companion to her.

The two angels found her alone, reading. As they drew near she lifted her great eyes in whose deeps of molten gold little sparks of light were for ever a-dance. Her brows were contracted into that austere fold which we see on the forehead of the Pythian Apollo; her nose was perfect and descended without a curve; her lips were compressed and imparted a disdainful and supercilious air to her whole countenance. Her tawny hair, with its gleaming lights, was carelessly adorned with the tattered remnants of a huge bird of prey, her garments lay about her in dark and shapeless folds. She was leaning her chin on a small ill-tended hand.

Arcade, who had but recently heard references made to this powerful archangel, showed her marked esteem, and placed entire confidence in her. He immediately proceeded to tell of the progress his mind had made towards knowledge and liberty, of his lucubrations in the d'Esparvieu library, of his philosophical reading, his studies of nature, his exegetical labours, his anger and his contempt when he recognized the deception of the demiurge, his voluntary exile among mankind, and, finally, of his project to stir up rebellion in heaven. Ready to dare all against an odious master, whom he pursued with inextinguishable

hatred, he expressed his profound happiness at finding in Ithuriel a mind capable of counselling and helping him in his great undertaking.

'You are not a very old hand at revolutions,' said Zita, smiling.

Nevertheless, she doubted neither the sincerity nor the firmness of his declared resolve, and she congratulated him on his intellectual audacity.

'That is what is most lacking in our people,' she said, 'they do not think.'

And she added almost immediately: 'But on what can intelligence sharpen its wits, in a country where the climate is soft and existence made easy? Even here, where necessity calls for intellectual activity, nothing is rarer than a person who thinks.'

'Nevertheless,' replied Maurice's guardian angel, 'man has created science. The important thing is to introduce it into heaven. When the angels possess some notions of physics, chemistry, astronomy, and physiology; when the study of matter shows them worlds in an atom, and an atom in myriads of planets; when they see themselves lost between these two infinities; when they weigh and measure the stars, analyse their composition, and calculate their orbits, they will recognize that these monsters work in obedience to forces which no intelligence can define, or that each star has its particular divinity, or indigenous god; and they will realize that the gods of Aldebaran, Betelgeuse, and Sirius are greater than Ialdabaoth. When at length they come to scrutinize with care the little world in which their lot is cast, and, piercing the crust of the earth, note the gradual evolution of its flora and fauna and the rude origin of man, who, under the shelter of rocks and in cave dwellings, had no God but himself; when they discover that united by the bonds of universal kinship to plants, beasts, and men, they have successively endued all forms of organic life, from the simplest and the most primitive, until they became at length the most beautiful of the children of light, they will perceive that Ialdabaoth, the obscure demon of an insignificant world lost in space, is imposing on their credulity when He pretends that they

issued from nothingness at His bidding; they will perceive that He lies in calling Himself the Infinite, the Eternal, the Almighty, and that, so far from having created worlds, He knows neither their number nor their laws. They will perceive that He is like unto one of them; they will despise Him, and, shaking off His tyranny, will fling Him into the Gehenna where He has hurled those more worthy than Himself.'

'Do you think so?' murmured Zita, puffing out the smoke of her cigarette. . . . 'Nevertheless, this knowledge, by virtue of which you reckon to enfranchise heaven, has not destroyed religious sentiment on earth. In countries where they have set up and taught this science of physics, of chemistry, astronomy, and geology, which you think capable of delivering the world, Christianity has retained almost all its sway. If the positive sciences have had such a feeble influence on the beliefs of mankind, it is not likely they will exercise a greater one on the opinions of the angels, and nothing is of such dubious efficacy as scientific propaganda.'

'What!' exclaimed Arcade, 'you deny that science has given the Church its death-blow? Is it possible? The Church, at any rate, judges otherwise. Science, which you believe has no power over her, is redoubtable to her, since she proscribes it. From Galileo's dialogues to Monsieur Aulard's little manuals she has condemned all its discoveries. And not without reason.

'In former days, when she gathered within her fold all that was great in human thought, the Church held sway over the bodies as well as over the souls of men, and imposed unity of obedience by fire and sword. To-day her power is but a shadow and the elect among the great minds have withdrawn from her. That is the state to which science has reduced her.'

'Possibly,' replied the beautiful archangel, 'but how slowly, with what vicissitudes, at the price of what efforts, of what sacrifices!'

Zita did not absolutely condemn scientific propaganda, but she anticipated no prompt or certain results from it. For her it was not so much a question of enlightening the

angels; the important thing was to enfranchise them. In her opinion one only exerted a strong influence on individuals, whoever they might be, by rousing their passions, and appealing to their interests.

'Persuade the angels that they will cover themselves with glory by overthrowing the tyrant, and that they will be happier once they are free; that is the most practical policy to attempt, and, for my own part, I am devoting all my energies to its fulfilment. It is certainly no light task, because the kingdom of heaven is a military autocracy, and there is no public opinion in it. Nevertheless, I do not despair of starting an intellectual movement. I do not wish to boast, but no one is more closely acquainted than I with the different classes of angelic society.'

Throwing away her cigarette Zita pondered for a moment, then, amid the click of ivory balls on the billiard table, the clinking of glasses, the curt voices of the players announcing their points, the monotonous answers of the waiters to their customers, the Archangel enumerated the entire population of the spirits of light.

'We must not count on the Dominations, the Virtues, or the Powers, which compose the celestial lower middle-class. I have no need to tell you, for you know it as well as I, how selfish, base, and cowardly the middle classes are. As to the great dignitaries, the ministers, the generals, Thrones, Cherubim, and Seraphim, you know what they are; they will take no action. Let us, however, once prove ourselves the stronger, and we shall have them with us. For if autocrats do not readily acquiesce in their own downfall, once overthrown, all their forces recoil upon themselves. It will be well to work the army. Entirely loyal as the army is, it will allow itself to be influenced by a clever anarchist propaganda. But our greatest and most constant efforts ought to be brought to bear upon the angels of your own category, Arcade: the guardian angels, who dwell upon earth in such great numbers. They fill the lowest ranks of the hierarchy, are for the most part discontented with their lot, and more or less imbued with the ideas of the present century.'

She had already conferred with the guardian angels of

Montmartre, Clignancourt, and Filles-du-Calvaire. She had devised the plan of a vast association of Spirits on Earth with the view of conquering heaven.

'To accomplish this task,' she said, 'I have established myself in France. But not because I had the folly to believe myself freer in a republic than in a monarchy. Quite the contrary, for there is no country where the liberty of the individual is less respected than in France. But the people are indifferent to everything connected with religion; nowhere else, therefore, should I enjoy such tranquillity.'

She invited Arcade to unite his efforts to hers, and when they separated at the door of the *brasserie* the steel shutter was already making its groaning descent.

'Above all,' said Zita, 'you must meet the gardener Nectaire. I will take you to his rustic home one day.'

Théophile, who had slumbered during all this talk, begged his friend to come home with him and smoke a cigarette. He lived quite near in the small street opposite, leading off the boulevard. Arcade would see Bouchotte, she would please him.

They climbed up five flights of stairs. Bouchotte had not yet returned. A tin of sardines lay open on the piano. Red stockings coiled about the arm-chairs.

'It 's a little place, but it 's comfortable,' said Théophile.

And gazing out of the window which looked out on the russet-coloured night, with its myriad lights, he added: 'One can see the Sacré-Cœur.' His hand on Arcade's shoulder, he repeated several times: 'I am glad to see you.'

Then, dragging his former companion in glory into the kitchen passage, he put down his candlestick, drew a key from his pocket, opened a cupboard, and raising a linen covering disclosed two large white wings.

'You see,' he said, 'I have preserved them. From time to time, when I am alone, I go and look at them; it does me good.'

And he dabbed his reddened eyes. He stood awhile overcome by silent emotion. Then holding the candle near the long pinions which were moulting their down in places, he murmured: 'They are eaten away.'

'You must put some pepper on them,' said Arcade.

'I have done so,' replied the angelic musician, sighing. 'I have put pepper, camphor, and salts on them. But nothing does any good.'

XIV

Which reveals the kerûb toiling for the welfare of humanity and concludes in an entirely novel manner with the miracle of the flute.

THE first night of his incarnation Arcade slept at the Angel Istar's, in a garret in that narrow, gloomy rue Mazarine, which wallows along beneath the shadow of the old Institute of France. Istar, who had been expecting him, had pushed against the wall the shattered retorts, cracked pots, broken bottles, and odds and ends of iron stoves which made up the furniture of his room, and spread his clothes on the floor to lie on, leaving his guest his folding bed with its straw mattress.

The celestial spirits differ from one another in appearance according to the hierarchy and the choir to which they belong, and according to their own particular nature. They are all beautiful; but in different fashion, and they do not all offer to the eye the soft contours and dimpling smiles of childhood with its rosy lights and pearly tints. Nor do they all adorn themselves with eternal youth, that indefinable beauty that Greek art in its decline has imparted to its most lovingly handled marbles, and whereof Christian painters have so often timidly essayed to give us veiled and softened imitations. In some of them the chin glows with tufts of hair, and the limbs are furnished with such vigorous muscles that it seems as if serpents were writhing beneath the skin. Some have no wings, others possess two, four, or six; others again are formed entirely of conjoined pinions. Many, and these not the least illustrious, take the form of superb monsters, such as the centaurs of fable; nay, one may even see some who are living chariots, and wheels of fire. A member of the highest celestial hierarchy, Istar belonged to the choir of cherubim or kerûbs who see above them the seraphim

alone. In common with all the angelic spirits of his rank he had formerly borne in heaven the bodily shape of a winged bull surmounted by the head of a horned and bearded man, and carrying between his loins the attributes of generous fecundity. He was vaster and more vigorous than any animal on earth, and when he stood erect with outspread wings he covered with his shadow sixty archangels.

Such was Istar in his native home. There he radiated strength and sweetness. His heart was full of courage and his soul benevolent. Moreover in those days he loved his Lord. He believed Him to be good and yielded Him faithful service. But even while guarding the portals of his Master, he used to ponder unceasingly on the punishment of the rebellious angels and the curse of Eve. His mind worked slowly but profoundly. When after a long course of centuries he persuaded himself that Ialdabaoth in creating the world had created evil and death, he ceased to adore and to serve Him. His love changed to hatred, his veneration to contempt. He shouted his execrations in His face, and fled to earth.

Embodied in human form, and reduced to the stature of the sons of Adam, he still retained some characteristics of his former nature. His big protruding eyes, his beaked nose, his thick lips framed in a black beard which descended in curls on to his chest recalled those cherubim of the tabernacle of Iahveh, of which the bulls of Nineveh afford us a pretty accurate representation. He bore the name of Istar on earth as well as in heaven, and although exempt from vanity, and free from all social prejudice, he was immensely desirous of showing himself sincere and truthful in all things. He therefore proclaimed the illustrious rank in which his birth had placed him in the celestial hierarchy and translated into French his title of kerûb by the equivalent one of prince, calling himself Prince Istar. Seeking shelter among mankind he had developed an ardent love for them. While awaiting the coming of the hour when he should deliver heaven from bondage, he dreamed of the salvation of regenerate humanity and was eager to consummate the destruction of this wicked world, in order to raise upon its ashes, to the sound of the lyre, a city

radiant with happiness and love. A chemist in the pay of a dealer in nitrates, he lived very frugally. He wrote for newspapers with advanced views on liberty, spoke at public meetings, and had got himself sentenced several times to several months' imprisonment for anti-militarism.

Istar greeted his brother Arcade cordially, approved of his rupture with the party of crime, and informed him of the descent of fifty of the children of light who, at the present moment, formed a colony near Val de Grâce, imbued with a really excellent spirit.

'It is simply raining angels in Paris,' he said, laughing. 'Every day some dignitary of the sacred palace falls on one's head, and soon the Sultan of the Clouds will have no one to make into viziers or guards but the little unbreeched vagabonds of his aviaries.'

Soothed by the good news, Arcade fell asleep, full of happiness and hope.

He awoke in the early dawn and saw Prince Istar bending over his furnaces, his retorts, and his test tubes. Prince Istar was working for the good of humanity.

Every morning when Arcade woke he saw Prince Istar fulfilling his work of tenderness and love. Sometimes the kerûb, huddled up with his head in his hands, would softly murmur a few chemical formulas; at others, drawing himself up to his full height, like a dark naked column, with his head, his arms, nay, his entire bust clean out of the skylight window, he would deposit his melting-pot on the roof, fearing the perquisition with which he was constantly menaced. Moved by an immense pity for the miseries of the world wherein he dwelt in exile, conscious perhaps of the rumours to which his name gave rise, inebriated with his own virtue, he played the part of apostle to the human race, and neglecting the task he had undertaken in coming to earth, he forgot all about the emancipation of the angels. Arcade, who, on the contrary, dreamt of nothing else but of conquering heaven and returning thither in triumph, reproached the kerûb with forgetting his native land.

Prince Istar, with a great, frank, uncouth laugh, acknowledged that he had no preference for angels over men.

'If I am doing my best,' he replied to his celestial brother, 'if I am doing my best to stir up France and Europe, it is because the day is dawning which will behold the triumph of the social revolution. It is a pleasure to cast one's seed on ground so well prepared. The French having passed from feudalism to monarchy, and from monarchy to a financial oligarchy, will easily pass from a financial oligarchy to anarchy.'

'How erroneous it is,' retorted Arcade, 'to believe in great and sudden changes in the social order in Europe! The old order is still young in strength and power. The means of defence at her disposal are formidable. On the other hand, the proletariat's plan of defensive organization is of the vaguest description, and brings merely weakness and confusion to the struggle. In our celestial country all goes quite otherwise. Beneath an apparently unchangeable exterior all is rotten within. A mere push would suffice to overturn an edifice which has not been touched for millions of centuries. Outworn administration, outworn army, outworn finance, the whole thing is more worm-eaten than either the Russian or Persian autocracy.'

And the kindly Arcade adjured the kerûb to fly first to the aid of his brethren who, though dwelling amid the soft clouds with the sound of citterns and their cups of paradisal wine around them, were in more wretched plight than mankind bowed over the grudging earth. For the latter have a conception of justice, while the angels rejoice in iniquity. He exhorted him to deliver the Prince of Light and his stricken companions and to re-establish them in their ancient honours.

Prince Istar allowed himself to be convinced.

He promised to put the sweet persuasiveness of his words and the excellent formulae of his explosives at the service of the celestial revolution. He gave his promise.

'To-morrow,' he said.

And when the morrow came he continued his anti-militarist propaganda at Issy-les-Moulineaux. Like the Titan Prometheus, Istar loved mankind.

Arcade, suffering from all the desires to which the sons of Adam are subjected, found himself lacking in resources

to satisfy them. Istar gave him a start in a printing house in the rue de Vaugirard where he knew the foreman. Arcade, thanks to his celestial intelligence, soon knew how to set up type, and became in a short time a good compositor.

After standing all day in the whirring workroom, holding the composing stick in his left hand, and swiftly drawing the little leaden signs from the case in the order required by the copy fixed in the holder, he would go and wash his hands at the pump and dine at the corner bar, a newspaper propped up before him on the marble table. Being now no longer invisible, he could not make his way into the d'Esparvieu library, and was thus debarred from allaying his ardent thirst for knowledge at that inexhaustible source. He went, of an evening, to read at the library of Ste Geneviève on the famous hill of learning, but there were only ordinary books to be had there; greasy things, covered with ridiculous annotations, and lacking many pages.

The sight of women troubled and unsettled him. He would remember Madame des Aubels and her charm, and, although he was handsome, he was not loved, because of his poverty and his workaday clothes. He saw much of Zita, and took a certain pleasure in going for walks with her on Sundays along the dusty roads which edge the grass-grown trenches of the fortifications. They wandered, the pair of them, by wayside inns, market gardens, and green retreats, propounding and discussing the vastest plans that ever stirred the world, and, occasionally, as they passed along by some travelling circus, the steam organ of the merry-go-round would furnish an accompaniment to their words as they breathed fire and fury against heaven.

Zita used often to say:

'Istar means well, but he 's a simple fellow. He believes in the goodness of men and things. He undertakes the destruction of the old world and imagines that anarchy of itself will create order and harmony. You, Arcade, you believe in science; you deem that men and angels are capable of understanding, whereas, in point of fact, they are only creatures of sentiment. You may be quite sure

that nothing is to be obtained from them by appealing to their intelligence; one must rouse their interests and their passions.'

Arcade, Istar, Zita, and three or four other angelic conspirators occasionally forgathered in Théophile Belais's little flat, where Bouchotte gave them tea. Though she did not know that they were rebellious angels, she hated them instinctively, and feared them, for she had had a Christian education, albeit she had sadly failed to keep it up.

Prince Istar alone pleased her; she thought there was something kind-hearted and an air of natural distinction about him. He stove in the sofa, broke down the arm-chairs, and tore corners off sheets of music to make notes, which he thrust into pockets invariably crammed with pamphlets and bottles. The musician used to gaze sorrowfully at the manuscript of his operetta, *Aline, Queen of Golconda,* with its corners all torn off. The prince also had a habit of giving Théophile Belais all sorts of things to take care of—mechanical contrivances, chemicals, bits of old iron, powders, and liquids which gave off noisome smells. Théophile Belais put them cautiously away in the cupboard where he kept his wings, and the responsibility weighed heavily upon him.

Arcade was much pained at the disdain of those of his fellows who had remained faithful. When they met him as they went on their sacred errands they regarded him as they passed by with looks of cruel hatred or of pity that was crueller still.

He used to visit the rebel angels whom Prince Istar pointed out to him, and usually met with a good reception, but as soon as he began to speak of conquering heaven, they did not conceal the embarrassment and displeasure he caused them. Arcade perceived that they had no desire to be disturbed in their tastes, their affairs, and their habits. The falsity of their judgment, the narrowness of their minds, shocked him; and the rivalry, the jealousy they displayed towards one another deprived him of all hope of uniting them in a common cause. Perceiving how exile debases the character and warps the intellect he felt his courage fail him.

One evening, when he had confessed his weariness of spirit to Zita, the beautiful archangel said:

'Let us go and see Nectaire; Nectaire has remedies of his own for sadness and fatigue.'

She led him into the woods of Montmorency and stopped at the threshold of a small white house, adjoining a kitchen garden, laid waste by winter, where far back in the shadows the light shone on forcing frames and cracked glass melon shades.

Nectaire opened the door to his visitors, and, after quieting the growls of a big mastiff which protected the garden, led them into a low room warmed by an earthenware stove.

Against the whitewashed wall, on a deal board, among the onions and seeds, lay a flute ready to be put to the lips. A round walnut table bore a stone tobacco jar, a pipe, a bottle of wine, and some glasses. The gardener offered each of his guests a cane-seated chair, and himself sat down on a stool by the table.

He was a sturdy old man; thick grey hair stood up on his head, he had a furrowed brow, a snub nose, a red face, and a forked beard.

The big mastiff stretched himself at his master's feet, rested his short black muzzle on his paws, and closed his eyes. The gardener poured out some wine for his guests, and when they had drunk and talked a little, Zita said to Nectaire:

'Please play your flute to us; you will give pleasure to my friend whom I have brought to see you.'

The old man immediately consented. He put the box-wood pipe to his lips—so clumsy was it that it looked as if the gardener had fashioned it himself—and preluded with a few strange runs. Then he developed rich melodies in which the trills sparkled like diamonds and pearls on a velvet ground. Touched by cunning fingers, animated with creative breath, the rustic pipe sang like a silver flute. There were no over-shrill notes, and the tone was always even and pure. One seemed to be listening to the nightingale and the muses singing together, the soul of nature and the soul of man. And the old man ordered and developed his thoughts in a musical language full of grace and daring. He told of love, of fear, of vain quarrels, of

all-conquering laughter, of the calm light of the intellect, of the arrows of the mind piercing with their golden shafts the monsters of Ignorance and Hate. He told also of Joy and Sorrow bending their twin heads over the earth, and of Desire, who brings worlds into being.

The whole night listened to the flute of Nectaire. Already the evening star showed above the paling horizon.

There they sat; Zita with hands clasped about her knees, Arcade, his head leaning on his hand, his lips apart. Motionless they listened. A lark, which had awakened hard by in a sandy field, lured by these novel sounds, rose swiftly in the air, hovered a few seconds, then dropped at one swoop into the musician's orchard. The neighbouring sparrows, forsaking the crannies of the mouldering walls, came and sat in a row on the window-ledge whence notes came welling forth that gave them more delight than oats or grains of barley. A jay, coming for the first time out of his wood, folded his sapphire wings on a leafless cherry-tree. Beside the drain-head, a large black rat, glistening with the greasy water of the sewers, sitting on his hind legs, raised his short arms and slender fingers in amazement. A field mouse, that dwelt in the orchard, was seated near him. Down from the tiles came the old tom cat, who retained the grey fur, the ringed tail, the powerful loins, the courage and the pride of his ancestors. He pushed against the half-open door with his nose and approaching the flute player with silent tread, sat gravely down, pricking his ears that had been torn in many a nocturnal combat; the grocer's white cat followed him, sniffing the vibrant air, and then, arching her back and closing her blue eyes, listened in ravishment. Mice, swarming in crowds from under the boards, surrounded them, and fearing neither tooth nor claw, sat motionless, their pink hands folded voluptuously on their bosoms. Spiders that had strayed far from their webs, with waving legs, gathered in a charmed circle on the ceiling. A small grey lizard, that had glided on to the doorstep, stayed there, fascinated, and, in the loft, the bat might have been seen hanging by her claws, head down, now half-awakened from her winter sleep, swaying to the rhythm of the marvellous flute.

XV

Wherein we see young Maurice bewailing the loss of his guardian angel, even in his mistress's arms, and wherein we hear the Abbé Patouille reject as vain and illusory all notions of a new rebellion of the angels.

A FORTNIGHT had elapsed since the angel's apparition in the flat. For the first time Gilberte arrived before Maurice at the rendezvous. Maurice was gloomy, Gilberte sulky. So far as they were concerned nature had resumed her drab monotony. They eyed each other languidly, and kept glancing towards the angle between the wardrobe with the mirror and the window, where recently the pale shade of Arcade had taken shape, and where now the blue cretonne of the hangings was the only thing visible. Without giving him a name (it was unnecessary) Madame des Aubels asked:

'You have not seen him since?'

Slowly, sadly, Maurice turned his head from right to left, and from left to right.

'You look as if you missed him,' continued Madame des Aubels. 'But come, confess that he gave you a terrible fright, and that you were shocked at his unconventionality.'

'Certainly he was unconventional,' said Maurice without any resentment.

'Tell me, Maurice, is it nothing to you now to be with me alone? . . . You need an angel to inspire you. That is sad, for a young man like you!'

Maurice appeared not to hear, and asked gravely:

'Gilberte, do you feel that your guardian angel is watching over you?'

'I, not at all. I have never thought of him, and yet I am not without religion. In the first place, people who have none are like animals. And then one cannot go straight without religion. It is impossible.'

'Exactly, that's just it,' said Maurice, his eyes on the violet stripes of his flowerless pyjamas; 'when one has one's guardian angel one does not even think about him, and when one has lost him one feels very lonely.'

'So you miss this . . .'

'Well, the fact is . . .'

'Oh, yes, yes, you miss him. Well, my dear, the loss of such a guardian angel as that is no great matter. No, no! he is not worth much, that Arcade of yours. On that famous day, while you were out getting him some clothes, he was ever so long fastening my dress, and I certainly felt his hand . . . Well, at any rate, don't trust him.'

Maurice dreamily lit a cigarette. They spoke of the six days' bicycle race at the winter track, and of the aviation show at the motor exhibition at Brussels, without experiencing the slightest amusement. Then they tried love-making as a sort of convenient pastime, and succeeded in becoming moderately absorbed in it; but at the very moment when she might have been expected to play a part more in accordance with a mutual sentiment, she exclaimed with a sudden start:

'Good heavens, Maurice, how stupid of you to tell me that my guardian angel can see me! You cannot imagine how uncomfortable the idea makes me.'

Maurice, somewhat taken aback, recalled, a little roughly, his mistress's wandering thoughts.

She declared that her principles forbade her to think of playing a round game with angels.

Maurice was longing to see Arcade again, and had no other thought. He reproached himself for suffering him to depart without discovering where he was going, and he cudgelled his brains night and day thinking how to find him again.

On the bare chance, he put a notice in the personal column of one of the big papers, running thus:

'Arcade. Come back to your Maurice.'

Day after day went by, and Arcade did not return.

One morning, at seven o'clock, Maurice went to St Sulpice to hear Abbé Patouille say mass, then, as the priest was leaving the sacristy, he went up to him and asked to be heard for a moment.

They descended the steps of the church together, and in the bright morning light walked round the fountain of the Quatre Évêques. In spite of his troubled conscience

and the difficulty of presenting so extraordinary a case with any degree of credibility, Maurice related how the angel Arcade had appeared to him and had announced his unhappy resolve to separate from him and to stir up a new revolt of the spirits of glory. And young d'Esparvieu asked the worthy ecclesiastic how to find his celestial guardian again, since he could not bear his absence, and how to lead his angel back to the Christian faith. Abbé Patouille replied in tone of affectionate sorrow that his dear child had been dreaming, that he took a morbid hallucination for reality, and that it was not permissible to believe that good angels may revolt.

'People have a notion,' he added, 'that they can lead a life of dissipation and disorder with impunity. They are wrong. The abuse of pleasure corrupts the intelligence and impairs the understanding. The devil takes possession of the sinner's senses, penetrating even to his soul. He has deceived you, Maurice, by a clumsy artifice.'

Maurice objected that he was not in any way a victim of hallucinations, that he had not been dreaming, that he had seen his guardian angel with his eyes and heard him with his ears.

'Monsieur l'Abbé,' he insisted, 'a lady who happened to be with me at the time—I need not mention her name—also saw and heard him. And, moreover, she felt the angel's fingers straying . . . well, anyhow, she felt them. . . . Believe me, Monsieur l'Abbé, nothing could be more real, more positively certain than this apparition. The angel was fair, young, very handsome. His clear skin seemed, in the shadow, as if bathed in milky light. He spoke in a pure, sweet voice.'

'That, alone, my child,' the Abbé interrupted quickly, 'proves you were dreaming. According to all the demonologies, bad angels have a hoarse voice, which grates like a rusty lock, and even if they did contrive to give a certain look of beauty to their faces, they cannot succeed in imitating the pure voice of the good spirits. This fact, attested by numerous witnesses, is established beyond all doubt.'

'But, Monsieur l'Abbé, I saw him. I saw him sit down,

stark naked, in an arm-chair on a pair of black stockings. What more evidence do you want?'

The Abbé Patouille appeared in no way disturbed by this announcement.

'I say once more, my son,' he replied, 'that these unhappy illusions, these dreams of a deeply troubled soul, are to be ascribed to the deplorable state of your conscience. I believe, moreover, that I can detect the particular circumstance that has caused your unstable mind thus to come to grief. During the winter, in company with Monsieur Sariette and your Uncle Gaétan, you came, in an evil frame of mind, to see the Chapel of the Holy Angels in this church, then undergoing repair. As I observed on that occasion, it is impossible to keep artists too closely to the rules of Christian art; they cannot be too strongly enjoined to respect Holy Writ and its authorized interpreters. Monsieur Eugène Delacroix did not suffer his fiery genius to be controlled by tradition. He brooked no guidance and here in this chapel he has painted pictures which in common parlance we call lurid, compositions of a violent, terrible nature which, far from inspiring the soul with peace, quietude, and calm, plunge it into a state of agitation. In them the angels are depicted with wrathful countenances, their features are sombre and uncouth. One might take them to be Lucifer and his companions meditating their revolt. Well, my son, it was these pictures, acting upon a mind already weakened and undermined by every kind of dissipation, that have filled it with the trouble to which it is at present a prey.'

But Maurice would have none of it.

'Oh, no, Monsieur l'Abbé,' he cried, 'it is not Eugène Delacroix's pictures that have been troubling me. I didn't so much as look at them. I am completely indifferent to that kind of art.'

'Well, then, my son, believe me: there is no truth, no reality, in any of the story you have just related to me. Your guardian angel has certainly not appeared to you.'

'But, Abbé,' replied Maurice, who had the most absolute confidence in the evidence of the senses, 'I saw him tying

up a woman's shoe-laces and putting on the trousers of a suicide.'

And stamping his feet on the asphalt, Maurice called as witnesses to the truth of his words the sky, the earth, all nature, the towers of St Sulpice, the walls of the great seminary, the fountain of the Quatre Évêques, the public lavatory, the cab and taxi shelter, the motor-bus shelter, the trees, the passers-by, the dogs, the sparrows, the flower-seller and her flowers.

The Abbé made haste to end the interview.

'All this is error, falsehood, and illusion, my child,' said he. 'You are a Christian: think as a Christian. A Christian does not allow himself to be seduced by empty shadows. Faith protects him against the seduction of the marvellous, he leaves credulity to freethinkers. There are credulous people for you—freethinkers! There is no humbug they will not swallow. But the Christian carries a weapon which dissipates diabolical illusions—the sign of the cross. Reassure yourself, Maurice—you have not lost your guardian angel. He still watches over you. It lies with you not to make this task too difficult nor too painful for him. Good-bye, Maurice. The weather is going to change, for I feel a burning in my big toe.'

And Abbé Patouille went off with his breviary under his arm, hobbling along with a dignity that seemed to foretell a mitre.

That very day, Arcade and Zita were leaning over the parapet of La Butte, gazing down on the mist and smoke that lay floating over the vast city.

'Is it possible,' said Arcade, 'for the mind to conceive all the pain and suffering that lie pent within a great city? It is my belief that if a man succeeded in realizing it, the weight of it would crush him to the earth.'

'And yet,' answered Zita, 'every living being in that place of torment is enamoured of life. It is a great enigma!

'Unhappy, ill-fated, while they live, the idea of ceasing to be is, nevertheless, a horror to them. They look not for solace in annihilation, it does not even bring them the promise of rest. In their madness they even look upon nothingness with terror: they have peopled it with phan-

toms. Look you at these pediments, these towers, and domes, and spires that pierce the mist and rear on high their glittering crosses. Men bow in adoration before the demiurge who has given them a life that is worse than death, and a death that is worse than life.'

Zita was for a long time lost in thought. At length she broke silence, saying:

'There is something, Arcade, that I must confess to you. It was no desire for a purer justice or wiser laws that hurried Ithuriel earthward. Ambition, a taste for intrigue, the love of wealth and honour, all these things made heaven, with its calm, unbearable to me, and I longed to mingle with the restless race of men. I came, and by an art unknown to nearly all the angels, I learned how to fashion myself a body which, since I could change it as the fancy seized me, to whatsoever age and sex I would, has permitted me to experience the most diverse and amazing of human destinies. A hundred times I took a position of renown among the leaders of the day, the lords of wealth and princes of nations. I will not reveal to you, Arcade, the famous names I bore; know only that I was pre-eminent in learning, in the fine arts, in power, wealth, and beauty, among all the nations of the world. At last, it was but a few years since, as I was journeying in France, under the outward semblance of a distinguished foreigner, I chanced to be roaming at evening through the forest of Montmorency, when I heard a flute unfolding all the sorrows of heaven. The purity and sadness of its notes rent my very soul. Never before had I hearkened to aught so lovely. My eyes were wet with tears, my bosom full of sobs, as I drew near and beheld, on the skirts of a glade, an old man like to a faun, blowing on a rustic pipe. It was Nectaire. I cast myself at his feet, imprinted kisses on his hands and on his divine lips, and fled away. . . .

'From that day forth, conscious of the littleness of human achievements, weary of the tumult and the vanity of earthly things, ashamed of my vast and profitless endeavours, and deciding to seek out a loftier aim for my ambition, I looked upwards towards my skyey home and vowed I would return to it as a deliverer. I rid myself of

titles, name, wealth, friends, the horde of sycophants and flatterers and, as Zita the obscure, set to work in indigence and solitude, to bring freedom into heaven.'

'And I,' said Arcade, 'I too have heard the flute of Nectaire. But who is this old gardener who can thus woo from a rude wooden pipe notes that are so moving an so beautiful?'

'You will soon know,' answered Zita.

XVI

Wherein Mira the seeress, Zéphyrine, and the fatal Amédée are successively brought upon the scene, and wherein the notion of Euripides that those whom Zeus wishes to crush he first makes mad, is illustrated by the terrible example of Monsieur Sariette.

DISAPPOINTED at his failure to enlighten an ecclesiastic renowned for his clarity of mind, and frustrated in the hope of finding his angel again on the high road of orthodoxy, Maurice took it into his head to resort to occultism, and resolved to go and consult a seer. He would have undoubtedly applied to Madame de Thèbes, but he had already questioned her on the occasion of his early love troubles, and her replies showed such wisdom that he no longer believed her to be a soothsayer. He therefore had recourse to a fashionable medium, Madame Mira. He had heard many examples quoted of the extraordinary insight of this seeress, but it was necessary to present Madame Mira with some object which the absent one had either touched or worn and to which her translucent gaze had to be attracted. Maurice, trying to remember what the angel had touched since his ill-fated incarnation, recollected that in his celestial nudity he had sat down in an arm-chair on Madame des Aubels's black stockings and that he had afterwards helped that lady to dress.

Maurice asked Gilberte for one of the talismans required by the clairvoyante. But Gilberte could not give him a single one, unless, as she said, she herself were to play the part of the talisman. For the angel had, in her case, displayed the greatest indiscretion, and such agility that it

was impossible always to forestall his enterprise. On hearing this confession, which nevertheless told him nothing new, Maurice lost his temper with the angel, calling him by the names of the lowest animals and swearing he would give him a good kick when he got him within reach of his foot. But his fury soon turned against Madame des Aubels; he accused her of having provoked the insolence she now denounced, and in his wrath he referred to her by all the zoological symbols of immodesty and perversity. His love for Arcade was rekindled in his heart, and burned with a more ardent flame than ever, and the deserted youth, with outstretched arms and bended knees, invoked his angel with sobs and lamentations.

During his sleepless nights it occurred to him that perhaps the books the angel had turned over before his incarnation might serve as a talisman. One morning, therefore, Maurice went up to the library and greeted Monsieur Sariette, who was cataloguing under the romantic gaze of Alexandre d'Esparvieu. Monsieur Sariette smiled, but his face was deathly pale. Now that an invisible hand no longer upset the books placed under his charge, now that tranquillity and order once more reigned in the library, Monsieur Sariette was happy, but his strength diminished day by day. There was little left of him but a frail and contented shadow.

One dies, in full content, of sorrow past.

'Monsieur Sariette,' said Maurice, 'you remember that time when your books were disarranged every night, how armfuls disappeared, how they were dragged about, turned over, ruined, and sent rolling helter-skelter as far as the gutter in the rue Palatine. Those were great days! Point out to me, Monsieur Sariette, the books which suffered most.'

This proposition threw Monsieur Sariette into a melancholy stupor, and Maurice had to repeat his request three times before he could make the aged librarian understand. At length he pointed to a very ancient Talmud of Jerusalem as having been frequently touched by those unseen hands. An apocryphal gospel of the third century, consisting of twenty papyrus sheets, had also quitted its

place time after time. Gassendi's correspondence, too, seemed to have been well thumbed.

'But,' added Monsieur Sariette, 'the book to which the mysterious visitant devoted the most particular attention was undoubtedly a little copy of Lucretius adorned with the arms of Philippe de Vendôme, Grand Prior of France, with autograph annotations by Voltaire, who, as is well known, frequently visited the Temple in his younger days. The fearsome reader who caused me such terrible anxiety never grew weary of this Lucretius, and made it his bedside book, as it were. His taste was sound, for it 's a gem of a thing. Alas! the monster made a blot of ink on page 137, which perhaps the chemists with all the science at their disposal will be powerless to erase.'

And Monsieur Sariette heaved a profound sigh. He repented having said all this when young d'Esparvieu asked him for the loan of the precious Lucretius. Vainly did the jealous custodian affirm that the book was being repaired at the binder's, and was not available. Maurice made it clear that he wasn't to be taken in like that. He strode resolutely into the abode of the philosophers and the globes and seating himself in an arm-chair said:

'I am waiting.'

Monsieur Sariette suggested his having another edition. There were some that, textually, were more correct, and were, therefore, preferable from the student's point of view. He offered him Barbou's edition, or Coustelier's, or, better still, a French translation. He could have the Baron des Coutures's version—which was perhaps a little old-fashioned—or La Grange's, or those in the Nisard and Panckouke series; or, again, there were two versions of striking elegance, one in verse and the other in prose, both from the pen of Monsieur de Pongerville of the French Academy.

'I don't need a translation,' said Maurice proudly. 'Give me the Prior de Vendôme's copy.'

Monsieur Sariette went slowly up to the cupboard in which the jewel in question was contained. The keys were rattling in his trembling hand. He raised them to the lock and withdrew them again immediately and sug-

gested that Maurice should have the common Lucretius published by Garnier.

'It 's very handy,' said he with an engaging smile.

But the silence with which this proposal was received made it clear that resistance was useless. He slowly drew forth the volume from its place, and having taken the precaution to see that there wasn't a speck of dust on the table-cloth, he laid it tremblingly thereon before the great-grandson of Alexandre d'Esparvieu.

Maurice began to turn the leaves, and when he got to page 137 he saw the stain which had been made with violet ink. It was about the size of a pea.

'Aye, that 's it,' said old Sariette, who had his eye on the Lucretius the whole time; 'that 's the trace those invisible monsters left behind them.'

'What, there were several of them, Monsieur Sariette?' exclaimed Maurice.

'I cannot tell. But I don't know whether I have a right to have this blot removed since, like the blot Paul Louis Courier made on the Florentine manuscript, it constitutes a literary document, so to speak.'

Scarcely were the words out of the old fellow's mouth when the front door bell rang, and there was a confused noise of voices and footsteps in the next room. Sariette ran forward at the sound and collided with Père Guinardon's mistress, old Zéphyrine, who, with her tousled hair sticking up like a nest of vipers, her face aflame, her bosom heaving, her belly like an eiderdown quilt puffed out by a terrific gale, was choking with grief and rage. And amid sobs and sighs and groans and all the innumerable sounds which, on earth, make up the mighty uproar to which the emotions of living beings and the tumult of nature give rise, she cried:

'He 's gone, the monster! He 's gone off with her. He 's cleared out the whole shanty and left me to shift for myself with eighteenpence in my purse.'

And she proceeded to give a long and incoherent account of how Michel Guinardon had abandoned her and gone to live with Octavie, the bread-woman's daughter, and she let loose a torrent of abuse against the traitor.

'A man whom I 've kept going with my own money for fifty years and more. For I 've had plenty of the needful and known plenty of the upper ten and all. I dragged him out of the gutter, and now this is what I get for it. He 's a bright beauty, that friend of yours. The lazy scoundrel! Why, he had to be dressed like a child, the drunken, contemptible brute. You don't know him yet, Monsieur Sariette. He 's a forger. He turns out Giottos, Giottos, I tell you, and Fra Angelicos and Grecos, as hard as he can and sells them to art dealers—yes, and Fragonards too, and Baudouins. He 's a debauchee, and doesn't believe in God! That 's the worst of the lot, Monsieur Sariette, for without the fear of God . . .'

Long did Zéphyrine continue to pour forth vituperations. When at last her breath failed her, Monsieur Sariette availed himself of the opportunity to exhort her to be calm, and bring herself to look on the bright side of things. Guinardon would come back. A man doesn't forget any one he 's lived and got on well with for fifty years——

These two observations only goaded her to a fresh outburst, and Zéphyrine swore she would never forget the slight that had been put on her; she swore she would never have the monster back with her any more. And if he came to ask her to forgive him on his knees, she would let him grovel at her feet.

'Don't you understand, Monsieur Sariette, that I despise and hate him, that he makes me sick?'

Sixty times she voiced these lofty sentiments; sixty times she vowed she would never have Guinardon back with her again, that she couldn't bear the sight of him, even in a picture.

Monsieur Sariette made no attempt to oppose a resolve which, after protestations such as these, he regarded as unshakable. He did not blame Zéphyrine in the least. He even supported her. Unfolding to the deserted one a purer future, he told her of the frailty of human sentiment, exhorted her to display a spirit of renunciation, and enjoined her to show a pious resignation to the will of God.

'Seeing, in truth, that your friend is so little worthy of affection . . .'

He was not suffered to continue. Zéphyrine flew at him, and shaking him furiously by the collar of his frock coat, she yelled, half choking with rage: 'So little worthy of affection! Michel! Ah! my boy, you find another more kind, more gay, more witty, you find another like him, always young, yes, always. Not worthy of affection! Any one can see you don't know anything about love, you old dotard.'

Taking advantage of the fact that Père Sariette was thus deeply engaged, young d'Esparvieu slipped the little Lucretius into his pocket, and strolled deliberately past the crouching librarian, bidding him adieu with a little wave of the hand.

Armed with his talisman, he hastened to the place des Ternes, to interview Madame Mira. She received him in a red drawing-room where neither owl nor frog nor any of the paraphernalia of ancient magic were to be found. Madame Mira, in a prune-coloured dress, her hair powdered, though already past her prime, was of very good appearance. She spoke with a certain elegance and prided herself on discovering hidden things by the sole help of science, philosophy, and religion. She felt the morocco binding, feigning to close her eyes, and looking meanwhile through the narrow slit between her lids at the Latin title and the coat of arms which conveyed nothing to her.

Accustomed to receive as tokens such things as rings, handkerchiefs, letters, and locks of hair, she could not conceive to what sort of individual this singular book could belong. By habitual and mechanical cunning she disguised her real surprise under a feigned surprise.

'Strange!' she murmured, 'strange! I do not see quite clearly. . . . I perceive a woman. . . .'

As she let fall this magic word, she glanced furtively to see what sort of an effect it had and beheld on her questioner's face an unexpected look of disappointment. Perceiving that she was off the track, she immediately changed her oracle:

'But she fades away immediately. It is strange, strange!

I have a confused impression of some vague form, a being that I cannot define,' and having assured herself by a hurried glance that, this time, her words were going down, she expatiated on the vagueness of the person and on the mist that enveloped him.

However, the vision grew clearer to Madame Mira, who was following a clue step by step.

'A wide street . . . a square with a statue . . . a deserted street—stairs. He is there in a bluish room—he is a young man, with pale and careworn face. There are things he seems to regret, and which he would not do again did they still remain undone.'

But the effort at divination had been too great. Fatigue prevented the clairvoyante from continuing her transcendental researches. She spent her remaining strength in impressively recommending him who consulted her to remain in intimate union with God if he wished to regain what he had lost and succeed in his attempts.

On leaving Maurice placed a louis on the mantelpiece, and went away moved and troubled, persuaded that Madame Mira possessed supernatural faculties, but unfortunately insufficient ones.

At the bottom of the stairs he remembered he had left the little Lucretius on the table of the pythoness, and, thinking that the old maniac Sariette would never get over its loss, went up to recover possession of it.

On re-entering the paternal abode his gaze lighted upon a shadowy and grief-stricken figure. It was old Sariette, who in tones as plaintive as the wail of the November wind began to beg for his Lucretius. Maurice pulled it carelessly out of his greatcoat pocket.

'Don't flurry yourself, Monsieur Sariette,' said he. 'There the thing is.'

Clasping the jewel to his bosom the old librarian bore it away and laid it gently down on the blue table-cloth, thinking all the while where he might safely hide his precious treasure, and turning over all sorts of schemes in his mind as became a zealous curator. But who among us shall boast of his wisdom? The foresight of man is short, and his prudence is for ever being baffled. The

blows of fate are ineluctable; no man shall evade his doom. There is no counsel, no caution that avails against destiny. Hapless as we are, the same blind force which regulates the courses of atom and of star, fashions universal order from our vicissitudes. Our ill-fortune is necessary to the harmony of the universe. It was the day for the binder, a day which the revolving seasons brought round twice a year, beneath the sign of the Ram and the sign of the Scales. That day, ever since morning, Monsieur Sariette had been making things ready for the binder. He had laid out on the table as many of the newly purchased paper-bound volumes as were deemed worthy of a permanent binding or of being put in boards, and also those books whose binding was in need of repair, and of all these he had drawn up a detailed and accurate list. Punctually at five o'clock, old Amédée, the man from Léger-Massieu's, the binder in the rue de l'Abbaye, presented himself at the d'Esparvieu library and, after a double check had been carried out by Monsieur Sariette, thrust the books he was to take back to his master into a piece of cloth which he fastened into knots at the four corners and hoisted on to his shoulder. He then saluted the librarian with the following words: 'Good night, all!' and went downstairs.

Everything went off on this occasion as usual. But Amédée, seeing the Lucretius on the table, innocently put it into the bag with the others, and took it away without Monsieur Sariette's perceiving it. The librarian quitted the home of the philosophers and globes in entire forgetfulness of the book whose absence had been causing him such horrible anxiety all day long. Some people may take a stern view of the matter, and call this a lapse, a defection of his better nature. But would it not be more accurate to say that fate had decided that things should come to pass in this manner, and that what is called chance, and is in fact but the regular order of nature, had accomplished this imperceptible deed which was to have such awful consequences in the sight of man? Monsieur Sariette went off to his dinner at the Quatre Évêques, and read his paper, *La Croix*. He was tranquil and serene. It was only the next morning when he entered the abode

of the philosophers and globes that he remembered the Lucretius. Failing to see it on the table he looked for it everywhere, but without success. It never entered his head that Amédée might have taken it away by mistake. What he did think was that the invisible visitant had returned, and he was mightily disturbed.

The unhappy curator, hearing a noise on the landing, opened the door and found it was little Léon, who, with a gold-braided *képi* stuck on his head, was shouting 'Vive la France!' and hurling dusters and feather brooms and Hippolyte's floor polish at imaginary foes. The child preferred this landing for playing soldiers to any other part of the house, and sometimes he would stray into the library. Monsieur Sariette was seized with the sudden suspicion that it was he who had taken the Lucretius to use as a missile and he ordered him, in threatening tones, to give it back. The child denied that he had taken it, and Monsieur Sariette had recourse to cajolery.

'Léon, if you bring me back the little red book, I will give you some chocolates.'

The child grew thoughtful; and in the evening, as Monsieur Sariette was going downstairs, he met Léon, who said:

'There 's the book!'

And, holding out a much-torn picture book called *The Story of Gribouille*, demanded his chocolates.

A few days later the post brought Maurice the prospectus of an inquiry agency managed by an ex-employee at the Prefecture of Police; it promised celerity and discretion. He found at the address indicated a moustached gentleman, morose and careworn, who demanded a deposit and promised to find the individual.

The ex-police official soon wrote to inform him that very onerous investigations had been commenced and asked for fresh funds. Maurice gave him no more and resolved to carry on the search himself. Imagining, not without some likelihood, that the angel would associate with the wretched, seeing that he had no money, and with the exiled of all nations—like himself, revolutionaries—he visited the lodging houses at St Ouen, at La Chapelle,

Montmartre, and the Barrière d'Italie. He sought him in the doss-houses, public houses where they give you plates of tripe, and others where you can get a sausage for three sous; he searched for him in the cellars at the Market and at Père Momie's.

Maurice visited the restaurants where nihilists and anarchists take their meals. There he came across men dressed as women, gloomy and wild-looking youths, and blue-eyed octogenarians who laughed like little children. He observed, asked questions, was taken for a spy, had a knife thrust into him by a very beautiful woman, and the very next day continued his search in beer houses, lodging houses, houses of ill-fame, gambling hells down by the fortifications, at the receivers of stolen goods, and among the 'apaches.'

Seeing him thus pale, harassed, and silent, his mother grew worried.

'We must find him a wife,' she said. 'It is a pity that Mademoiselle de la Verdelière has not a bigger fortune.'

Abbé Patouille did not hide his anxiety.

'This child,' he said, 'is passing through a moral crisis.'

'I am more inclined to think,' replied Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, 'that he is under the influence of some bad woman. We must find him an occupation which will absorb him and flatter his vanity. I might get him appointed Secretary to the Committee for the Preservation of Country Churches, or Consulting Counsel to the Syndicate of Catholic Plumbers.'

XVII

Wherein we learn that Sophar, no less eager for gold than Mammon, looked upon his heavenly home less favourably than upon France, a country blessed with Thrift and Credit, and wherein we see, yet once again, that whoso is possessed of this world's goods fears the evil effects of any change.

MEANWHILE Arcade led a life of obscure toil. He worked at a printer's in the rue St Benoît, and lived in an attic in the rue Mouffetard. His comrades having gone on

strike, he left the workroom and devoted his day to his propaganda. So successful was he that he won over to the side of revolt fifty thousand of those guardian angels who, as Zita had surmised, were discontented with their condition and imbued with the spirit of the times. But lacking money, he lacked liberty, and could not employ his time as he wished in instructing the sons of heaven. So, too, Prince Istar, hampered by want of funds, manufactured fewer bombs than were needed, and these less fine. Of course he prepared a good many small pocket machines. He had filled Théophile's rooms with them, and not a day passed but he forgot some and left them lying about on the seats in various cafés. But a nice bomb, easily handled and capable of destroying many big mansions, costs from twenty to twenty-five thousand francs; and Prince Istar only possessed two of this kind. Equally bent on procuring funds, Arcade and Istar both went to make a request for money from a celebrated financier named Max Everdingen, who, as every one knows, is the managing director of the biggest banking concern in France, and indeed in the whole world. What is not so well known is that Max Everdingen was not born of woman, but is a fallen angel. Nevertheless, such is the truth. In heaven he was named Sophar, and guarded the treasures of Ialdabaoth, a great collector of gold and precious stones. In the exercise of this function Sophar contracted a love of riches which could not be satisfied in a state of society in which banks and stock exchanges are alike unknown. His heart flamed with an ardent love for the god of the Hebrews, to whom he remained faithful during a long course of centuries. But at the commencement of the twentieth century of the Christian era, casting his eyes down from the height of the firmament upon France, he saw that this country, under the name of a republic, was constituted as a plutocracy, and that, under the appearance of a democratic government, high finance exercised sovereign sway, untrammelled and unchecked.

Henceforth life in the empyrean became intolerable to him. He longed for France as for the promised land, and one day, bearing with him all the precious stones he could

carry, he descended to earth and established himself in Paris. This angel of cupidity did good business there. Since his materialization his face had lost its celestial aspect; it reproduced the Semitic type in all its purity, and one could admire the lines and the puckers which wrinkle the faces of bankers and which are to be seen in the money-changers of Quintin Matsys.

His beginnings were humble, and his success amazing. He married an ugly woman, and they saw themselves reflected in their children as in a mirror. Baron Max Everdingen's large mansion, which rears itself on the heights of the Trocadéro, is crammed with the spoils of Christian Europe.

The baron received Arcade and Prince Istar in his study —one of the most modest rooms in his mansion. The ceiling is decorated with a fresco of Tiepolo, taken from a Venetian palace. The bureau of the regent, Philip of Orleans, is in this room, which is full of cabinets, show-cases, pictures, and statues.

Arcade allowed his gaze to wander over the walls.

'How comes it, my brother Sophar,' said he, 'that you, in spite of your Jewish heart, obey so ill the commandment of the Lord your God who said: "Thou shalt have no graven images"? for here I see an Apollo of Houdon's and a Hebe of Lemoine's, and several busts by Caffieri. And, like Solomon in his old age, O son of God, you set up in your dwelling-place the idols of strange nations: for such are this Venus of Boucher, this Jupiter of Rubens, and those nymphs that are indebted to Fragonard's brush for the gooseberry jam which smears their gleaming limbs. And here in this single show-case, Sophar, you keep the sceptre of St Louis, six hundred pearls of Maris Antoinette's broken necklace, the imperial mantle of Charles V, the tiara wrought by Ghiberti for Pope Martin V, the Colonna, Bonaparte's sword—and I know not what besides.'

'Mere trifles,' said Max Everdingen.

'My dear baron,' said Prince Istar, 'you even possess the ring which Charlemagne placed on a fairy's finger, and which was thought to be lost. But let us discuss the

business on which we have come. My friend and I have come to ask you for money.'

'I can well believe it,' replied Max Everdingen. 'Every one wants money, but for different reasons. What do you want money for?'

Prince Istar replied simply:

'To stir up a revolution in France.'

'In France?' repeated the baron, 'in France? Well, I shall give you no money for that, you may be quite sure.'

Arcade did not disguise the fact that he had expected greater liberality and more generous help from a celestial brother.

'Our project,' he said, 'is a vast one. It embraces both heaven and earth. It is settled in every detail. We shall first bring about a social revolution in France, in Europe, on the whole planet; then we shall carry war into the heavens, where we shall establish a peaceful democracy. And to reduce the citadels of heaven, to overturn the mountain of God, to storm celestial Jerusalem, a vast army is needful, enormous resources, formidable machines, and electrophores of a strength yet unknown. It is our intention to commence with France.'

'You are madmen!' exclaimed Baron Everdingen; 'madmen and fools! Listen to me. There is not one single reform to carry out in France. All is perfect, finally settled, unchangeable. You hear?—unchangeable.' And to add force to his statement, Baron Everdingen banged his fist three times on the regent's bureau.

'Our points of view differ,' said Arcade gently. '*I* think, as does Prince Istar, that everything should be changed in this country. But what boots it to dispute the matter? Moreover, it is too late. We have come to speak to you, O my brother Sophar, in the name of five hundred thousand celestial spirits, all resolved to commence the universal revolution to-morrow.'

Baron Everdingen exclaimed that they were crazy, that he would not give a *sou*, that it was both criminal and mad to attack the most admirable thing in the world, the thing which renders earth more beautiful than heaven

—Finance. He was a poet and a prophet. His heart thrilled with holy enthusiasm; he drew attention to Thrift, virtuous Thrift, that chaste and pure Thrift like unto the Virgin of the Canticle who, issuing from the depths of the country in rustic petticoat, bears to robust and splendid Credit—her bridegroom, who awaits her—the treasures of her love; and drew a picture of Credit, enriched with the gifts of its spouse, pouring on all the nations of the world torrents of gold, which, of themselves, by a thousand invisible channels return in still greater abundance to the blessed land from which hey sprang.

'By Thrift and Credit,' he went on, 'France has become the New Jerusalem, shedding her glory over all the nations of Europe, and the Kings of the Earth come to kiss her rosy feet. And that is what you would fain destroy? You are both impious and sacrilegious.'

Thus spoke the angel of finance. An invisible harp accompanied his voice, and his eyes darted lightning.

Meanwhile Arcade, leaning carelessly against the regent's bureau, spread out under the banker's eyes various ground plans, underground plans, and sky plans of Paris with red crosses indicating the points where bombs should be simultaneously placed in cellars and catacombs, thrown on public ways, and flung by a flotilla of aeroplanes. All the financial establishments, and notably the Everdingen Bank and its branches, were marked with red crosses.

The financier shrugged his shoulders.

'Nonsense! you are but wretches and vagabonds, shadowed by all the police of the world. You are penniless. How can you manufacture all the machines?'

By way of reply, Prince Istar drew from his pocket a small copper cylinder, which he gracefully presented to Baron Everdingen.

'You see,' said he, 'this ordinary-looking box. It is only necessary to let it fall on the ground immediately to reduce this mansion with its inmates to a mass of smoking ashes, and to set a fire going which would devour all the Trocadéro quarter. I have ten thousand like that, and I make three dozen a day.'

The financier asked the kerûb to replace the machine in his pocket, and continued in a conciliatory tone:

'Listen to me, my friends. Go and start a revolution at once in heaven, and leave things alone in this country. I will sign a cheque for you. You can procure all the material you need to attack celestial Jerusalem.'

And Baron Everdingen was already working up in his imagination a magnificent deal in electrophores and war-material.

XVIII

Wherein is begun the gardener's story, in the course of which we shall see the destiny of the world unfolded in a discourse as broad and magnificent in its views as Bossuet's 'Discourse on the History of the Universe' is narrow and dismal.

THE gardener bade Arcade and Zita sit down in an arbour hung with Virginia creeper, at the far end of the orchard.

'Arcade,' said the beautiful archangel, 'Nectaire will perhaps reveal to you to-day the things you are burning to know. Ask him to speak.'

Arcade did so and old Nectaire, laying down his pipe, began as follows:

'I knew him. He was the most beautiful of all the seraphim. He shone with intelligence and daring. His great heart was big with all the virtues born of pride: frankness, courage, constancy in trial, indomitable hope. Long, long ago, ere time was, in the boreal sky where gleam the seven magnetic stars, he dwelt in a palace of diamond and gold, where the air was ever tremulous with the beating of wings and with songs of triumph. Iahveh, on his mountain, was jealous of Lucifer. You both know it: angels, like men, feel love and hatred quicken within them. Capable, at times, of generous resolves, they too often follow their own interests and yield to fear. Then, as now, they showed themselves, for the most part, incapable of lofty thoughts, and in the fear of the Lord lay their sole virtue. Lucifer, who held vile things in proud disdain, despised this rabble of commonplace

spirits for ever wallowing in a life of feasts and pleasure. But to those who were possessed of a daring spirit, a restless soul, to those fired with a wild love of liberty, he proffered friendship, which was returned with adoration. These latter deserted in a mass the Mountain of God and yielded to the seraph the homage which That Other would fain have kept for himself alone.

'I ranked among the Dominations, and my name, Alaciel, was not unknown to fame. To satisfy my mind—that was ever tormented with an insatiable thirst for knowledge and understanding—I observed the nature of things, I studied the properties of minerals, air, and water. I sought out the laws which govern matter, solid or ethereal, and after much pondering I perceived that the universe had not been formed as its pretended Creator would have us believe; I knew that all that exists, exists of itself and not by the caprice of Iahveh; that the world is itself its own creator and the spirit its own God. Henceforth I despised Iahveh for his imposture, and I hated him because he showed himself to be opposed to all that I found desirable and good: liberty, curiosity, doubt. These feelings drew me towards the seraph. I admired him, I loved him. I dwelt in his light. When at length it appeared that a choice had to be made between him and That Other I ranged myself on the side of Lucifer and knew no other aim than to serve him, no other desire than to share his lot.

'War having become inevitable, he prepared for it with indefatigable vigilance and all the resourcefulness of a far-seeing mind. Making the Thrones and Dominations into Chalybes and Cyclopes, he drew forth iron from the mountains bordering his domain, iron, which he valued more than gold, and forged weapons in the caverns of heaven. Then in the desert plains of the north he assembled myriads of spirits, armed them, taught them, and drilled them. Although prepared in secret, the enterprise was too vast for his adversary not to be soon aware of it. It might in truth be said that he had always foreseen and dreaded it, for he had made a citadel of his abode and a warlike host of his angels, and he gave himself the name of the God of Hosts. He made ready his thunderbolts. More than

half of the children of heaven remained faithful to him; thronging round him he beheld obedient souls and patient hearts. The Archangel Michael, who knew not fear, took command of these docile troops. Lucifer, as soon as he saw that his army could gain no more in numbers or in warlike skill, moved it swiftly against the foe, and promising his angels riches and glory marched at their head towards the mountain upon whose summit stands the throne of the universe. For three days our host swept onward over the ethereal plains. Above our heads streamed the black standards of revolt. And now, behold, the Mountain of God shone rosy in the orient sky and our chief scanned with his eyes the glittering ramparts. Beneath the sapphire walls the foe was drawn up in battle array, and, while we marched clad in our iron and bronze, they shone resplendent in gold and precious stones.

'Their gonfalons of red and blue floated in the breeze, and lightning flashed from the points of their lances. In a little while the armies were only sundered one from the other by a narrow strip of level and deserted ground, and at this sight even the bravest shuddered as they thought that there in bloody conflict their fate would soon be sealed.

'Angels, as you know, never die. But when bronze and iron, diamond point or flaming sword tear their ethereal substance, the pain they feel is more acute than men may suffer, for their flesh is more exquisitely delicate; and should some essential organ be destroyed, they fall inert and, slowly decomposing, are resolved into clouds, and during long aeons float insensible in the cold ether. And when at length they resume spirit and form they fail to recover full memory of their past life. Therefore it is but natural that angels shrink from suffering, and the bravest among them is troubled at the thought of being reft of light and sweet remembrance. Were it otherwise the angelic race would know neither the delight of battle nor the glory of sacrifice. Those who, before the beginning of time, fought in the empyrean for or against the God of armies, would have taken part without honour in mock battles, and it would not now become me to say to you, my children, with rightful pride:

'"I was there!"

'Lucifer gave the signal for the onset and led the assault. We fell upon the enemy, thinking to destroy him then and there, and carry the sacred citadel at the first onslaught. The soldiers of the jealous God, less fiery, but no whit less firm than ours, remained immovable. The Archangel Michael commanded them with the calmness and resolution of a mighty spirit. Thrice we strove to break through their lines, thrice they opposed to our iron-clad breasts the flaming points of their lances, swift to pierce the stoutest cuirass. In millions the glorious bodies fell. At length our right wing pierced the enemy's left and we beheld the Principalities, the Powers, the Virtues, the Dominations, and the Thrones turn and flee in full career; while the Angels of the Third Choir, flying distractedly above them, covered them with a snow of feathers mingled with a rain of blood. We sped in pursuit of them amid the debris of chariots and broken weapons, and we spurred their nimble flight. Suddenly a storm of cries amazed us. It grew louder and nearer. With desperate shrieks and triumphal clamour the right wing of the enemy, the giant archangels of the Most High, had flung themselves upon our left flank and broken it. Thus we were forced to abandon the pursuit of the fugitives and hasten to the rescue of our own shattered troops. Our prince flew to rally them, and re-established the conflict. But the left wing of the enemy, whose ruin he had not quite consummated, no longer pressed by lance or arrow, regained courage, returned, and faced us yet again. Night fell upon the dubious field. While under the shelter of darkness, in the still, silent air stirred ever and anon by the moans of the wounded, his forces were resting from their toils, Lucifer began to make ready for the next day's battle. Before dawn the trumpets sounded the reveille. Our warriors surprised the enemy at the hour of prayer, put them to rout, and long and fierce was the carnage that ensued. When all had either fallen or fled, the Archangel Michael, none with him save a few companions with four wings of flame, still resisted the onslaughts of a countless host. They fell back ceaselessly opposing their breasts to us,

andMichael still displayed an impassible countenance. The sun had run a third of its course when we commenced to scale the Mountain of God. An arduous ascent it was: sweat ran from our brows, a dazzling light blinded us. Weighed down with steel, our feathery wings could not sustain us, but hope gave us wings that bore us up. The beautiful seraph, pointing with glittering hand, mounting ever higher and higher, showed us the way. All day long we slowly climbed the lofty heights which at evening were robed in azure, rose, and violet. The starry host appearing in the sky seemed as the reflection of our own arms. Infinite silence reigned above us. We went on, intoxicated with hope; all at once from the darkened sky lightning darted forth, the thunder muttered, and from the cloudy mountain-top fell fire from heaven. Our helmets, our breastplates were running with flames, and our bucklers broke under bolts sped by invisible hands. Lucifer, in the storm of fire, retained his haughty mien. In vain the lightning smote him; mightier than ever he stood erect, and still defied the foe. At length, the thunder, making the mountain totter, flung us down pell-mell, huge fragments of sapphire and ruby crashing down with us as we fell, and we rolled inert, swooning, for a period whose duration none could measure.

'I awoke in a darkness filled with lamentations. And when my eyes had grown accustomed to the dense shadows I saw round me my companions in arms, scattered in thousands on the sulphurous ground, lit by fitful gleams of livid light. My eyes perceived but fields of lava, smoking craters, and poisonous swamps.

'*Mountains of ice and shadowy seas shut in the horizon.* A brazen sky hung heavy on our brows. And the horror of the place was such that we wept as we sat, crouched elbow on knee, our cheeks resting on our clenched hands.

'But soon, raising my eyes, I beheld the seraph standing before me like a tower. Over his pristine splendour sorrow had cast its mantle of sombre majesty.

'"Comrades," said he, "we must be happy and rejoice, for behold we are delivered from celestial servitude. Here

we are free, and it were better to be free in hell than serve in heaven. We are not conquered, since the will to conquer is still ours. We have caused the throne of the jealous God to totter; by our hands it shall fall. Arise, therefore, and be of good heart."

'Thereupon, at his command, we piled mountain upon mountain and on the topmost peak we reared engines which flung molten rocks against the divine habitations. The celestial host was taken unawares and from the abodes of glory there issued groans and cries of terror. And already we thought to re-enter in triumph on our high estate, but the Mountain of God was wreathed with lightnings, and thunderbolts, falling on our fortress, crushed it to dust. After this fresh disaster, the seraph remained awhile in meditation, his head buried in his hands. At length he raised his darkened visage. Now he was Satan, greater than Lucifer. Steadfast and loyal, the angels thronged about him.

'"Friends," he said, "if victory is denied us now, it is because we are neither worthy nor capable of victory. Let us determine wherein we have failed. Nature shall not be ruled, the sceptre of the universe shall not be grasped, Godhead shall not be won, save by knowledge alone. We must conquer the thunder; to that task we must apply ourselves unwearyingly. It is not blind courage (no one this day has shown more courage than you) which will win us the courts of heaven; but rather study and reflection. In these silent realms where we are fallen, let us meditate, seeking the hidden causes of things; let us observe the course of nature; let us pursue her with compelling ardour and all-conquering desire; let us strive to penetrate her infinite grandeur, her infinite minuteness. Let us seek to know when she is barren and when she brings forth fruit; how she makes cold and heat, joy and sorrow, life and death; how she assembles and disperses her elements, how she produces both the light air we breathe and the rocks of diamond and sapphire whence we have been precipitated, the divine fire wherewith we have been scarred and the soaring thought which stirs our minds. Torn with dire wounds, scorched by flame and

by ice, let us render thanks to fate which has sedulously opened our eyes, and let us rejoice at our lot. It is through pain that, suffering a first experience of nature, we have been roused to know her and to subdue her. When she obeys us we shall be as gods. But even though she hide her mysteries for ever from us, deny us arms and keep the secret of the thunder, we still must needs congratulate ourselves on having known pain, for pain has revealed to us new feelings, more precious and more sweet than those experienced in eternal bliss, and inspired us with love and pity, unknown to heaven."

'These words of the seraph changed our hearts and opened up fresh hope to us. Our hearts were filled with a great longing for knowledge and love.

'Meanwhile the earth was coming into being. Its immense and nebulous orb took on hourly more shape and more certainty of outline. The waters which fed the seaweed, the madrepores and shell-fish, and bore the light flotilla of the nautili upon their bosom, no longer covered it in its entirety; they began to sink into beds, and already continents appeared, where, on the warm slime, amphibious monsters crawled. Then the mountains were overspread with forests, and divers races of animals commenced to feed on the grass, the moss, the berries on the trees, and on the acorns. Then there took possession of cavernous shelters under the rocks, a being who was cunning to wound with a sharpened stone the savage beasts, and by his ruses to overcome the ancient denizens of forest, plain, and mountain.

'Man entered painfully on his kingdom. He was defenceless and naked. His scanty hair afforded him but little protection from the cold. His hands ended in nails too frail to do battle with the claws of wild beasts, but the position of his thumb, in opposition to the rest of his fingers, allowed him easily to grasp the most diverse objects and endowed him with skill in default of strength. Without differing essentially from the rest of the animals, he was more capable than any others of observing and comparing. As he drew from his throat various sounds, it occurred to him to designate by a particular inflection of

the voice whatever impinged upon his mind, and by this sequence of different sounds he was enabled to fix and communicate his ideas. His miserable lot and his painstaking spirit aroused the sympathy of the vanquished angels, who discerned in him an audacity equalling their own, and the germ of the pride that was at once their glory and their bane. They came in large numbers to be near him, to dwell on this young earth whither their wings wafted them in effortless flight. And they took pleasure in sharpening his talents and fostering his genius. They taught him to clothe himself in the skins of wild beasts, to roll stones before the mouths of caves to keep out the tigers and bears. They taught him how to make the flame burst forth by twirling a stick among the dried leaves and to foster the sacred fire upon the hearth. Inspired by the ingenious spirits he dared to cross the rivers in the hollowed trunks of cleft trees; he invented the wheel, the grinding-mill and the plough; the share tore up the earth and the wound brought forth fruit, and the grain offered to him who ground it divine nourishment. He moulded vessels in clay, and out of the flint he fashioned various tools.

'In fine, taking up our abode among mankind, we consoled them and taught them. We were not always visible to them, but of an evening, at the turn of the road, we would appear to them under forms often strange and weird, at times dignified and charming, and we adopted at will the appearance of a monster of the woods and waters, of a venerable old man, of a beautiful child, or of a woman with broad hips. Sometimes we would mock them in our songs or test their intelligence by some cunning prank. There were certain of us of a rather turbulent humour who loved to tease their women and children, but though lowly folk, they were our brothers, and we were never loath to come to their aid. Through our care their intelligence developed sufficiently to attain to mistaken ideas, and to acquire erroneous notions of the relations of cause and effect. As they supposed that some magic bond existed between the reality and its counterfeit presentment, they covered the walls of their caves with figures of animals

and carved in ivory images of the reindeer and the mammoth in order to secure as prey the creatures they represented. Centuries passed by with infinite slowness while their genius was coming to birth. We sent them happy thoughts in dreams, inspired them to tame the horse, to castrate the bull, to teach the dog to guard the sheep. They created the family and the tribe. It came to pass one day that one of their wandering tribes was assailed by ferocious hunters. Forthwith the young men of the tribe formed an enclosed ring with their chariots, and in it they shut their women, children, old people, cattle, and treasures, and from the platform of their chariots they hurled murderous stones at their assailants. Thus was formed the first city. Born in misery and condemned to do murder by the law of Iahveh, man put his whole heart into doing battle, and to war he was indebted for his noblest virtues. He hallowed with his blood that sacred love of country which should (if man fulfils his destiny to the very end) enfold the whole earth in peace. One of us, Daedalus, brought him the axe, the plumb line, and the sail. Thus we rendered the existence of mortals less hard and difficult. By the shores of the lakes they built dwellings of osier, where they might enjoy a meditative quiet unknown to the other inhabitants of the earth, and when they had learned to appease their hunger without too painful efforts we breathed into their hearts the love of beauty.

'They raised up pyramids, obelisks, towers, colossal statues which smiled, stiff and uncouth, and genetic symbols. Having learnt to know us or trying at least to divine what manner of beings we were, they felt both friendship and fear for us. The wisest among them watched us with sacred awe and pondered our teaching. In their gratitude the people of Greece and of Asia consecrated to us stones, trees, shadowy woods; offered us victims, and sang us hymns; in fact we became gods in their sight, and they called us Horus, Isis, Astarte, Zeus, Pallas, Cybele, Demeter, and Triptolemus. Satan was worshipped under the names of Dionysus, Evan, Iacchus, and Lenaeus. He showed in his various manifestations all the strength and beauty which it is given to mortals to conceive. His eyes had the sweet-

ness of the wood violet, his lips were brilliant with the ruby-red of the pomegranate, a down finer than the velvet of the peach covered his cheeks and his chin; his fair hair, wound like a diadem and knotted loosely on the crown of his head, was encircled with ivy. He charmed the wild beasts, and penetrating into the deep forests drew to him all wild spirits, everything that climbed in trees and peered through the branches with wild and timid gaze. On all these creatures fierce and fearful, that lived on bitter berries and beneath whose hairy breasts a wild heart beat, half-human creatures of the woods—on all he bestowed loving-kindness and grace, and they followed him drunk with joy and beauty. He planted the vine and showed mortals how to crush the grapes underfoot to make the wine flow. Magnificent and benign, he fared across the world, a long procession following in his train. To bear him company I took the form of a satyr; from my brow sprang two budding horns. My nose was flat and my ears were pointed. Glands, like those of the goat, hung on my neck, a goat's tail moved with my moving loins, and my hairy legs ended in a black cloven hoof which beat the ground in cadence.

'Dionysus fared on his triumphal march over the world. In his company I passed through Lydia, the Phrygian fields, the scorching plains of Persia, Media bristling with hoar frost, Arabia Felix, and rich Asia where flourishing cities were laved by the waves of the sea. He proceeded on a car drawn by lions and lynxes, to the sound of flutes, cymbals, and drums, invented for his mysteries. Bacchantes, Thyades, and Maenads, girt with the dappled fawn-skin, waved the thyrsus encircled with ivy. He bore in his train the Satyrs, whose joyous troop I led, Sileni, Pans, and Centaurs. Under his feet flowers and fruit sprang to life, and striking the rocks with his wand he made limpid streams gush forth. In the month of the vintage he visited Greece, and the villagers ran forth to meet him, stained with the green and ruddy juices of the plants. They wore masks of wood, or bark, or leaves; in their hands they bore earthen cups, and they danced wanton dances. Their womenfolk, imitating the companions of the God, their

heads wreathed with green smilax, fastened round their supple loins skins of fawn or goat. The virgins twined about their throats garlands of fig leaves, they kneaded cakes of flour, and bore the Phallus in the mystic basket. And the vine-dressers, all daubed with lees of wine, standing up in their wains and bandying mockery or abuse with the passers-by, invented tragedy.

'Truly, it was not in dreaming beside a fountain, but by dint of strenuous toil that Dionysus taught them to grow plants and to make them bring forth succulent fruits. And while he pondered the art of transforming the rough woodlanders into a race that should love music and submit to just laws, more than once over his brow, burning with the fire of enthusiasm, did melancholy and gloomy fever pass. But his profound knowledge and his friendship for mankind enabled him to triumph over every obstacle. O days divine! Beautiful dawn of life! We led the Bacchanals on the leafy summits of the mountains and on the yellow shores of the seas. The Naiads and the Oreads mingled with us at our play. Aphrodite at our coming rose from the foam of the sea to smile upon us.'

XIX

The gardener's story, continued.

'WHEN men had learned to cultivate the earth, to herd cattle, to enclose their holy places within walls, and to recognize the gods by their beauty, I withdrew to that smiling land girdled with dark woods and watered by the Stymphalos, the Olbios, the Erymanthus, and the proud Crathis, swollen with the icy waters of the Styx, and there, in a green valley at the foot of a hill planted with arbutus, olive, and pine, beneath a cluster of white poplars and plane-trees, by the side of a stream flowing with soft murmur amid tufted mastic-trees, I sang to the shepherds and the nymphs of the birth of the world, the origin of fire, of the tenuous air, of water and of earth. I told them how primeval men had lived wretched and naked in the woods,

before the ingenious spirits had taught them the arts; of God, too, I sang to them, and why they gave Dionysus Semele to mother, because his desire to befriend mankind was born amid the thunder.

'It was not without effort that this people, more pleasing than all the others in the eyes of the gods, these happy Greeks, achieved good government and a knowledge of the arts. Their first temple was a hut composed of laurel branches; their first image of the gods, a tree; their first altar, a rough stone stained with the blood of Iphigenia. But in a short time they brought wisdom and beauty to a point that no nation had attained before them, that no nation has since approached. Whence comes it, Arcade, this solitary marvel on the earth? Wherefore did the sacred soil of Ionia and of Attica bring forth this incomparable flower? Because nor priesthood, nor dogma, nor revelation ever found a place there, because the Greeks never knew the jealous God.

'It was his own grace, his own genius that the Greek made his gods, and when he raised his eyes to the heavens it was his own image that he saw reflected there. He conceived everything in due measure; and to his temples he gave perfect proportion. All therein was grace, harmony, symmetry, and wisdom; all were worthy of the immortals who dwelt within them and who under names of happy choice, in realized shapes, figured forth the genius of man. The columns which bore the marble architrave, the frieze, and the cornice were touched with something human, which made them venerable; and sometimes one might see, as at Athens and at Delphi, beautiful young girls, strong-limbed and radiant, upstaying the entablature of treasure house and sanctuary. O days of splendour, harmony, and wisdom!

'Dionysus resolved to repair to Italy, whither he was summoned under the name of Bacchus by a people eager to celebrate his mysteries. I took passage in his ship decked with tendrils of the vine, and landed under the eyes of the two brothers of Helen at the mouth of the yellow Tiber. Already under the teaching of the god, the inhabitants of Latium had learned to wed the vine to the

young stripling elm. It was my pleasure to dwell at the foot of the Sabine hills in a valley crowned with trees and watered with pure springs. I gathered the vervain and the mallow in the meadows. The pale olive-trees twisting their perforated trunks on the slope of the hill gave me of their unctuous fruit. There I taught a race of men with square heads, who had not, like the Greeks, a fertile mind, but whose hearts were true, whose souls were patient, and who reverenced the gods. My neighbour, a rustic soldier, who for fifteen years had bowed under the burden of his haversack, had followed the Roman eagle over land and sea, and had seen the enemies of the sovereign people flee before him. Now he drove his furrow with his two red oxen, starred with white between their spreading horns, while beneath the cabin's thatch his spouse, chaste and sedate of mien, pounded garlic in a bronze mortar and cooked the beans upon the sacred hearth. And I, his friend, seated near by under an oak, used to lighten his labours with the sound of my flute, and smile on his little children, when the sun, already low in the sky, was lengthening the shadows, and they returned from the wood all laden with branches. At the garden gate where the pears and pumpkins ripened, and where the lily and the evergreen acanthus bloomed, a figure of Priapus carved out of the trunk of a fig-tree menaced thieves with his formidable emblem, and the reeds swaying with the wind over his head scared away the plundering birds. At new moon the pious husbandman made offering of a handful of salt and barley to his household gods crowned with myrtle and with rosemary.

'I saw his children grow up, and his children's children, who kept in their hearts their early piety and did not forget to offer sacrifice to Bacchus, to Diana, and to Venus, nor omit to pour fresh wines and scatter flowers into the fountains. But slowly they fell away from their old habits of patient toil and simplicity.

'I heard them complain when the torrent, swollen with many rains, compelled them to construct a dyke to protect the paternal fields, and the rough Sabine wine grew unpleasing to their delicate palate. They went to drink the

wines of Greece at the neighbouring tavern; and the hours slipped unheeded by, while within the arbour shade they watched the dance of the flute player, practised at swaying her polished limbs to the sound of the castanets.

'Lulled by murmuring leaves and whispering streams, the tillers of the soil took sweet repose, but between the poplars we saw along the borders of the Sacred Way vast tombs, statues, and altars arise, and the rolling of the chariot wheels grew more frequent over the worn stones. A cherry sapling brought home by a veteran told us of the far-distant conquests of a consul, and odes sung to the lyre related the victories of Rome, mistress of the world.

'All the countries where the great Dionysus had journeyed, changing wild beasts into men, and making the fruit and grain bloom and ripen beneath the passing of his Maenads, now breathed the *pax Romana*. The nursling of the she-wolf, soldier and labouter, friend of conquered nations, laid out roads from the margin of the misty Ocean to the rocky slopes of the Caucasus; in every town rose the temples of Augustus and of Rome, and such was the universal faith in Latin justice that in the gorges of Thessaly or on the wooded borders of the Rhine, the slave, ready to succumb under his iniquitous burden, called aloud on the name of Caesar.

'But why must it be that on this ill-starred globe of land and water, all should wither and die and the fairest things be ever the most fleeting? O adorable daughters of Greece! O Science! O Wisdom! O Beauty! kindly divinities, you were wrapt in heavy slumber ere you submitted to the outrages of the barbarians, who already in the marshy wastes of the north and on the lonely steppes, ready to assail you, bestrode bare-backed their little shaggy horses.

'While, dear Arcade, the patient legionary camped by the borders of the Phasis and the Tanais, the women and the priests of Asia and of monstrous Africa invaded the Eternal City and troubled the sons of Remus with their magic spells. Until now, Iahveh, the persecutor of the laborious demons, was unknown to the world that he pretended to have created, save to certain miserable Syrian

tribes, ferocious like himself, and perpetually dragged from servitude to servitude. Profiting by the Roman peace, which assured free travel and traffic everywhere and favoured the exchange of ideas and merchandise, this old god insolently made ready to conquer the universe. He was not the only one, for the matter of that, to attempt such an undertaking. At the same time a crowd of gods, demiurges, and demons, such as Mithra, Thammuz, the good Isis, and Eubulus, meditated taking possession of the peace-enfolded world. Of all the spirits, Iahveh appeared the least prepared for victory. His ignorance, his cruelty, his ostentation, his Asiatic luxury, his disdain of laws, his affectation of rendering himself invisible, all these things were calculated to offend those Greeks and Latins who had absorbed the teaching of Dionysus and the Muses. He himself felt he was incapable of winning the allegiance of free men and of cultivated minds, and he employed cunning. To seduce their souls he invented a fable which, although not so ingenious as the myths wherewith we embellished the minds of our disciples of old, could, nevertheless, influence those feebler intellects which are to be found everywhere in great masses. He declared that men having committed a crime against him, an hereditary crime, should pay the penalty for it in their present life and in the life to come (for mortals vainly imagine that their existence is prolonged in hell); and the astute Iahveh gave out that he had sent his own son to earth to redeem with his blood the debt of mankind. It is not credible that a penalty should redress a fault, and it is still less credible that the innocent should pay for the guilty. The sufferings of the innocent atone for nothing, and do but add one evil to another. Nevertheless, unhappy creatures were found to adore Iahveh and his son, the expiator, and to announce their mysteries as good tidings. We should not be surprised at this folly. Have we not seen many times indeed human beings who, poor and naked, prostrate themselves before all the phantoms of fear, and rather than follow the teaching of well-disposed demons, obey the commandments of cruel demiurges? Iahveh, by his cunning, took souls as in a net. But he

did not gain therefrom, for his glorification, all that he expected. It was not he, but his son, who received the homage of mankind, and who gave his name to the new cult. He himself remained almost unknown upon earth.'

XX

The gardener's story, continued.

'The new superstition spread at first over Syria and Africa; it won over the seaports where the filthy rabble swarm, and, penetrating into Italy, infected at first the courtesans and the slaves, and then made rapid progress among the middle classes of the towns. But for a long while the countryside remained undisturbed. As in the past, the villagers consecrated a pine-tree to Diana, and sprinkled it every year with the blood of a young boar; they propitiated their lares with the sacrifice of a sow, and offered to Bacchus—benefactor of mankind—a kid of dazzling whiteness, or if they were too poor for this, at least they had a little wine and a little flour from the vineyard and from the fields for their household gods. We had taught them that it sufficed to approach the altar with clean hands, and that the gods rejoiced over a modest offering.

'Nevertheless, the reign of Iahveh proclaimed its advent in a hundred places by its extravagances. The Christians burnt books, overthrew temples, set fire to the towns, and carried on their ravages as far as the deserts. There, thousands of unhappy beings, turning their fury against themselves, lacerated their sides with points of steel. And from the whole earth the sighs of voluntary victims rose up to God like songs of praise.

'My shadowy retreat could not escape for long from the fury of their madness.

'On the summit of the hill which overlooked the olive woods, brightened daily with the sounds of my flute, had stood since the earliest days of the *pax Romana*, a small marble temple, round like the huts of old. It had no walls, but on a base of seven steps, sixteen columns rose

in a circle with the acanthus on the capitals, bearing a cupola of white tiles. This cupola sheltered a statue of Love fashioning his bow, the work of an Athenian sculptor. The child seemed to breathe, joy was welling from his lips, all his limbs were harmonious and supple. I honoured this image of the most powerful of all the gods, and I taught the villagers to bear to him as an offering a cup crowned with vervain and filled with wine two summers old.

'One day, when seated as my custom was at the feet of the god, pondering precepts and songs, an unknown man, wild-looking, with unkempt hair, approached the temple, sprang at one bound up the marble steps, and with savage glee exclaimed:

'"Die, poisoner of souls, and joy and beauty perish with you." He spoke thus, and drawing an axe from his girdle raised it against the god. I stayed his arm, I threw him down, and trampled him under my feet.

'"Demon," he cried desperately, "suffer me to overturn this idol, and you may slay me afterwards."

'I heeded not his atrocious plea, but leaned with all my might on his chest, which cracked under my knee, and, squeezing his throat with my two hands, I strangled the impious one.

'While he lay there, with purple face and lolling tongue, at the feet of the smiling god, I went to purify myself at the sacred stream. Then leaving this land, now the prey of the Christian, I passed through Gaul and gained the banks of the Saône, whither Dionysus had, in days gone by, carried the vine. The god of the Christians had not yet been proclaimed to this happy people. They worshipped for its beauty a leafy beech-tree, whose honoured branches swept the ground, and they hung fillets of wool thereon. They also worshipped a sacred stream and set up images of clay in a dripping grotto. They made offering of little cheeses and a bowl of milk to the nymphs of the woods and mountains.

'But soon an apostle of sorrow was sent to them by the new god. He was drier than a smoked fish. Although attenuated with fasting and watching, he taught with

unabated ardour all manner of gloomy mysteries. He loved suffering, and thought it good; his anger fell upon all that was beautiful, comely, and joyous. The sacred tree fell beneath his hatchet. He hated the nymphs, because they were beautiful, and he flung imprecations at them when their shining limbs gleamed among the leaves at evening, and he held my melodious flute in aversion. The poor wretch thought that there were certain forms of words wherewith to put to flight the deathless spirits that dwell in the cool groves, and in the depths of the woods, and on the tops of the mountains. He thought to conquer us with a few drops of water over which he had pronounced certain words and made certain gestures. The nymphs, to avenge themselves, appeared to him at nightfall and inflamed him with desire which the foolish knave thought criminal; then they fled, their laughter scattered like grain over the fields, while their victim lay tossing with burning limbs on his couch of leaves. Thus do the divine nymphs laugh at exorcizers, and mock the wicked and their sordid chastity.

'The apostle did not do as much harm as he wished, because his teaching was given to the simple souls living in obedience to nature, and because the mediocrity of most of mankind is such that they gain but little from the principles inculcated in them. The little wood in which I dwelt belonged to a Gaul of senatorial family, who retained some traces of Latin elegance. He loved his young freedwoman, and shared with her his bed of broidered purple. His slaves cultivated his garden and his vineyard; he was a poet and sang, in imitation of Ausonius, Venus whipping her son with roses. Although a Christian, he offered me milk, fruit, and vegetables as if I were the genius of the place. In return I charmed his idle moments with the music of my flute, and I gave him happy dreams. In fact, these peaceful Gauls knew very little of Iahveh and his son.

'But now behold fires looming on the horizon, and ashes driven by the wind fall within our forest glades. Peasants come driving a long file of wagons along the roads or urging their flocks before them. Cries of terror rise from the villages: "The Burgundians are upon us!"

'Now one horseman is seen, lance in hand, clad in shining bronze, his long red hair falling in two plaits on his shoulders. Then come two, then twenty, then thousands, wild and blood-stained; old men and children they put to the sword, aye, even aged grandams whose grey hairs cleave to the soles of the slaughterers' boots, mingled with the brains of babes new-born. My young Gaul and his young freedwoman stain with their blood the couch broidered with narcissi. The barbarians burn the basilicas to roast their oxen whole, shatter the amphorae, and drain the wine in the mud of the flooded cellars. Their women accompany them, huddled, half naked, in their war chariots. When the Senate, the dwellers in the cities, and the leaders of the churches had perished in the flames, the Burgundians, soddened with wine, lay down to slumber beneath the arcades of the Forum. Two weeks later one of them might have been seen smiling in his shaggy beard at the little child whom, on the threshold of their dwelling, his fair-haired spouse gathers in her arms; while another, kindling the fire of his forge, hammers out his iron with measured stroke; another sings beneath the oak-tree to his assembled comrades of the gods and heroes of his race; and yet others spread out for sale stones fallen from heaven, aurochs' horns, and amulets. And the former possessors of the country, regaining courage little by little, crept from the woods where they had fled for refuge, and returned to rebuild their burnt-down cabins, plough their fields, and prune their vines.

'Once more life resumed its normal course; but those times were the most wretched that mankind had yet experienced. The barbarians swarmed over the whole empire. Their ways were uncouth, and as they nurtured feelings of vengeance and greed, they firmly believed in the ransom of sin.

'The fable of Iahveh and his son pleased them, and they believed it all the more easily in that it was taught them by the Romans, whom they knew to be wiser than themselves, and to whose arts and mode of life they yielded secret admiration. Alas! the heritage of Greece and Rome had fallen into the hands of fools. All knowledge was lost.

In those days it was held to be a great merit to sing among the choir, and those who remembered a few sentences from the Bible passed for prodigious geniuses. There were still poets as there were birds, but their verse went lame in every foot. The ancient demons, the good genii of mankind, shorn of their honours, driven forth, pursued, hunted down, remained hidden in the woods. There, if they still showed themselves to men, they adopted, to hold them in awe, a terrible face, a red, green, or black skin, baleful eyes, an enormous mouth fringed with boar's teeth, horns, a tail, and sometimes a human face on their bellies. The nymphs remained fair, and the barbarians, ignorant of the winsome names they bore in other days, called them fairies, and, imputing to them a capricious character and puerile tastes, both feared and loved them.

'We had suffered a grievous fall, and our ranks were sadly thinned; nevertheless we did not lose courage, and maintaining a laughing aspect and a benevolent spirit we were in those direful days the real friends of mankind. Perceiving that the barbarians grew daily less sombre and ferocious, we lent ourselves to the task of conversing with them under all sorts of disguises. We incited them, with a thousand precautions, and by prudent circumlocutions, not to acknowledge the old Iahveh as an infallible master, not blindly to obey his orders, and not to fear his menaces. When need was, we had recourse to magic. We exhorted them unceasingly to study nature and to strive to discover the traces of ancient wisdom.

'These warriors from the north, rude though they were, were acquainted with some mechanical arts. They thought they saw combats in the heavens; the sound of the harp drew tears from their eyes; and perchance they had souls capable of greater things than the degenerate Gauls and Romans whose lands they had invaded. They knew not how to hew stone or to polish marble; but they caused porphyry and columns to be brought from Rome and from Ravenna; their chief men took for their seal a gem engraved by a Greek in the days when beauty reigned supreme. They raised walls with bricks, cunningly arranged like ears of corn, and succeeded in building quite

pleasing-looking churches with cornices upheld by brackets depicting grim faces, and heavy capitals whereon were represented monsters devouring one another.

'We taught them letters and sciences. A mouthpiece of their god, one Gerbert, took lessons in physics, arithmetic, and music with us, and it was said that he had sold us his soul. Centuries passed, and man's ways remained violent. It was a world given up to fire and blood. The successors of the studious Gerbert, not content with the possession of souls (the profits one gains thereby are lighter than air), wished to possess bodies also. They pretended that their universal and prescriptive monarchy was held from a fisherman on the lake of Tiberias. One of them thought for a moment to prevail over the loutish Germanus, successor to Augustus. But finally the spiritual had to come to terms with the temporal, and the nations were torn between two opposing masters.

'Nations took shape amid horrible tumult. On every side were wars, famines, and internecine conflicts. Since they attributed the innumerable ills that fell upon them to their god, they called him the Most Good not by way of irony, but because to them the best was he who smote the hardest. In those days of violence, to give myself leisure for study I adopted a role which may surprise you, but which was exceedingly wise.

'Between the Saône and the mountains of Charolais, where the cattle pasture, there lies a wooded hill sloping gently down to fields watered by a clear stream. There stood a monastery celebrated throughout the Christian world. I hid my cloven feet under a robe and became a monk in this abbey, where I lived peacefully, sheltered from the men-at-arms who to friend or foe alike showed themselves equally exacting. Man, who had relapsed into childhood, had all his lessons to learn over again. Brother Luke, whose cell was next to mine, studied the habits of animals, and taught us that the weasel conceives her young within her ear. I culled simples in the fields wherewith to soothe the sick, who, until then were made by way of treatment to touch the relics of saints. In the abbey were several demons similar to myself whom I recognized by

their cloven feet and by their kindly speech. We joined forces in our endeavours to polish the rough mind of the monks.

'While the little children played at hopscotch under the abbey walls our friends the monks devoted themselves to another game equally unprofitable, at which, nevertheless, I joined them, for one must kill time; that, when one comes to think of it, is the sole business of life. Our game was a game of words which pleased our coarse yet subtle minds, set school fulminating against school, and put all Christendom in an uproar. We formed ourselves into two opposing camps. One camp maintained that before there were apples there was the Apple; that before there were popinjays there was the Popinjay; that before there were lewd and greedy monks there were the Monk, Lewdness, and Greed; that before there were feet and before there were posteriors in this world the kick in the posterior must have had existence for all eternity in the bosom of God. The other camp replied that, on the contrary, apples gave man the idea of the apple; popinjays the idea of the popinjay; monks the idea of the monk, greed, and lewdness, and that the kick in the posterior existed only after having been duly given and received. The players grew heated and came to fisticuffs. I was an adherent of the second party, which satisfied my reason better, and which was, in fact, condemned by the Council of Soissons.

'Meanwhile, not content with fighting among themselves, vassal against suzerain, suzerain against vassal, the great lords took it into their heads to go and fight in the East. They said, as well as I can remember, that they were going to deliver the tomb of the son of God.

'They said so, but their adventurous and covetous spirit excited them to go forth and seek lands, women, slaves, gold, myrrh, and incense. These expeditions, need it be said, proved disastrous; but our thick-headed compatriots brought back with them the knowledge of certain crafts and oriental arts and a taste for luxury. Henceforth we had less difficulty in making them work and in putting them in the way of inventions. We built wonderfully beautiful churches, with daringly pierced arches, lancet-shaped

windows, high towers, thousands of pointed spires, which, rising in the sky towards Iahveh, bore at one and the same time the prayers of the humble and the threats of the proud, for it was all as much our doing as the work of men's hands; and it was a strange sight to see men and demons working together at a cathedral, each one sawing, polishing, collecting stones, graving, on capital and on cornice, nettles, thorns, thistles, wild parsley, and wild strawberry, carving faces of virgins and saints and weird figures of serpents, fishes with asses' heads, apes scratching their buttocks; each one, in fact, putting his own particular talent, mocking, sublime, grotesque, modest, or audacious, into the work and making of it all a harmonious cacophony, a rapturous anthem of joy and sorrow, a babel of victory. At our instigation the carvers, the goldsmiths, the enamellers, accomplished marvels and all the sumptuary arts flourished at once; there were silks at Lyons, tapestries at Arras, linen at Rheims, cloth at Rouen. The good merchants rode on their palfreys to the fairs bearing pieces of velvet and brocade, embroideries, orfrays, jewels, vessels of silver, and illuminated books. Strollers and players set up their trestles in the churches and in the public squares, and represented, according to their lights, simple chronicles of heaven, earth, and hell. Women decked themselves in splendid raiment and lisped of love.

'In the spring when the sky was blue, nobles and peasants were possessed with the desire to make merry in the flower-strewn meadows. The fiddler tuned his instrument, and ladies, knights, and demoiselles, townsfolk, villagers, and maidens, holding hands, began the dance. But suddenly War, Pestilence, and Famine entered the circle, and Death, tearing the violin from the fiddler's hands, led the dance. Fire devoured village and monastery. The men-at-arms hanged the peasants on the signposts at the cross-roads when they were unable to pay ransom, and bound pregnant women to tree trunks, where at night the wolves came and devoured the fruit within the womb. The poor people lost their senses. Sometimes, peace being re-established, and good times come again, they were seized with mad, unreasoning terror, abandoned their homes, and rushed

hither and thither in troops, half-naked, tearing themselves with iron hooks, and singing. I do not accuse Iahveh and his son of all this evil. Many ill things occurred without him, and even in spite of him. But where I recognize the instigation of the Good God (as they called him) was in the custom instituted by his pastors, and established throughout Christendom, of burning, to the sound of bells and the singing of psalms, both men and women who, taught by the demons, professed, concerning this God, opinions of their own.'

XXI

The gardener's story, concluded.

'It seemed as if science and thought had perished for all eternity, and that the earth would never again know peace, joy, and beauty.

'But one day, under the walls of Rome, some workmen, excavating the earth on the borders of an ancient road, found a marble sarcophagus which bore carved on its sides simulacra of Love and the triumphs of Bacchus.

'The lid being raised, a maiden appeared whose face shone with dazzling freshness. Her long hair spread over her white shoulders, she was smiling in her sleep. A band of citizens, thrilled with enthusiasm, raised the funeral couch, and bore it to the Capitol. The people came in crowds to contemplate the ineffable beauty of the Roman maiden, and stood around in silence, watching for the awakening of the divine soul held within this form of adorable beauty.

'And it came to pass that the city was so greatly stirred by this spectacle that the pope, fearing, not without reason, the birth of a pagan cult from this radiant body, caused it to be removed at night and secretly buried. The precaution was vain, the labour fruitless. After so many centuries of barbarism, the beauty of the antique world had appeared for a moment before the eyes of men; it was long enough for its image, graven on their hearts, to inspire them with an ardent desire to love and to know.

'Henceforth, the star of the God of the Christians paled and sloped to its decline. Bold navigators discovered worlds inhabited by numerous races who knew not old Iahveh, and it was suspected that he was no less ignorant of them, since he had given them no news of himself or of his son the expiator. A Polish canon demonstrated the true motions of the earth, and it was seen that, far from having created the world, the old demiurge of Israel had not even an inkling of its structure. The writings of philosophers, orators, jurisconsults, and ancient poets were dragged from the dust of the cloisters, and passing from hand to hand inspired men's minds with the love of wisdom. The vicar of the jealous God, the pope himself, no longer believed in Him whom he represented on earth. He loved the arts and had no other care than to collect ancient statues and to rear sumptuous buildings wherein were displayed the orders of Vitruvius re-established by Bramante. We began to breathe anew. Already the old gods, recalled from their long exile, were returning to dwell upon earth. There they found once more their temples and their altars. Leo, placing at their feet the ring, the three crowns, and the keys, offered them in secret the incense of sacrifices. Already Polyhymnia, leaning on her elbow, had begun to resume the golden thread of her meditations; already, in the gardens, the comely graces and the nymphs and satyrs were weaving their mazy dances, and at length the earth had joy once more within its grasp. But, O calamity, unlucky fate, most tragic circumstance! A German monk, all swollen with beer and theology, rose up against this renaissance of paganism, hurled menaces against it, shattered it, and prevailed single-handed against the princes of the Church. Inciting the nations, he called upon them to undertake a reform which saved that which was about to be destroyed. Vainly did the cleverest among us try to turn him from his work. A subtle demon, on earth called Beelzebub, marked him out for attack, now embarrassing him with learned controversial argument, now tormenting him with cruel mockery. The stubborn monk hurled his ink pot at his head and went on with his dismal reformation. What ultimately

happened? The sturdy mariner repaired, caulked, and refloated the damaged ship of the Church. Jesus Christ owes it to this shaveling that his shipwreck was delayed for perhaps more than ten centuries. Henceforth things went from bad to worse. In the wake of this loutish monk, this beer-swiller and brawler, came that tall, dry doctor from Geneva, who, filled with the spirit of the ancient Iahveh, strove to bring the world back again to the abominable days of Joshua and the Judges of Israel. A maniac was he, filled with cold fury, a heretic and a burner of heretics, the most ferocious enemy of the Graces.

'These mad apostles and their mad disciples made even demons like myself, even the horned devils, look back longingly on the time when the Son with his Virgin Mother reigned over the nations dazzled with splendours: cathedrals with their stone tracery delicate as lace, flaming roses of stained glass, frescoes painted in vivid colours telling countless wondrous tales, rich orfrays, glittering enamel of shrines and reliquaries, gold of crosses and of monstrances, waxen tapers gleaming like starry galaxies amid the gloom of vaulted arches, organs with their deep-toned harmonies. All this doubtless was not the Parthenon, nor yet the Panathenaea, but it gladdened eyes and hearts; it was, at all events, beauty. And these cursed reformers would not suffer anything either pleasing or lovable. You should have seen them climbing in black swarms over doorways, plinths, spires, and bell-towers, striking with senseless hammers those images in stone which the demons had carved working hand in hand with the master designers, those genial saints and dear, holy women, and the touching idols of Virgin Mothers pressing their suckling to their heart. For, to be just, a little agreeable paganism had slipped into the cult of the jealous God. These monsters of heretics were for extirpating idolatry. We did our best, my companions and I, to hamper their horrible work, and I, for one, had the pleasure of flinging down some dozens from the top of the porches and galleries on to the cathedral square, where their detestable brains got knocked out. The worst of it was that the Catholic Church also reformed herself and grew more mischievous than ever. In the

pleasant land of France, the seminarists and the monks were inflamed with unheard-of fury against the ingenious demons and the men of learning. My prior was one of the most violent opponents of sound knowledge. For some time past my studious lucubrations had caused him anxiety, and perhaps he had caught sight of my cloven foot. The scoundrel searched my cell and found paper, ink, some Greek books newly printed, and some pan-pipes hanging on the wall. By these signs he knew me for an evil spirit, and had me thrown into a dungeon where I should have eaten the bread of suffering and drunk the waters of bitterness, had I not promptly made my escape by the window and sought refuge in the wooded groves among the nymphs and the fauns.

'Far and wide the lighted pyres cast the odour of charred flesh. Everywhere there were tortures, executions, broken bones, and tongues cut out. Never before had the spirit of Iahveh breathed forth such atrocious fury. However, it was not altogether in vain that men had raised the lid of the ancient sarcophagus and gazed upon the Roman virgin.

'During this time of great terror when Papists and Reformers rivalled one another in violence and cruelty, amidst all these scenes of torture, the mind of man was regaining strength and courage. It dared to look up to the heavens, and there it saw, not the old Jew drunk with vengeance, but Venus Urania, tranquil and resplendent. Then a new order of things was born, then the great centuries came into being. Without publicly denying the god of their ancestors, men of intellect submitted to his mortal enemies, Science and Reason, and Abbé Gassendi relegated him gently to the far-distant abyss of first causes. The kindly demons who teach and console unhappy mortals, inspired the great minds of those days with discourses of all kinds, with comedies and tales told in the most polished fashion. Women invented conversation, the art of intimate letter-writing, and politeness. Manners took on a sweetness and a nobility unknown to preceding ages. One of the finest minds of that age of reason, the amiable Bernier, wrote one day to Saint-Évremond: "It is a great sin to deprive oneself of a pleasure." And this pronounce-

ment alone should suffice to show the progress of intelligence in Europe. Not that there had not always been Epicureans but, unlike Bernier, Chapelle, and Molière, they had not the consciousness of their talent.

'Then even the very devotees understood nature. And Racine, fierce bigot that he was, knew as well as such an atheistical physician as Guy Patin, how to attribute to divers states of the organs the passions which agitate mankind.

'Even in my abbey, whither I had returned after the turmoil, and which sheltered only the ignorant and the shallow thinkers, a young monk, less of a dunce than the rest, confided to me that the Holy Spirit expresses itself in bad Greek to humiliate the learned.

'Nevertheless, theology and controversy were still raging in this society of thinkers. Not far from Paris in a shady valley there were to be seen solitary beings, known as "les Messieurs," who called themselves disciples of St Augustine, and argued with honest conviction that the God of the Scriptures strikes those who fear Him, spares those who confront Him, holds works of no account and damns—should He so wish it—His most faithful servants; for His justice is not our justice, and His ways are incomprehensible.

'One evening I met one of these gentlemen in his garden, where he was pacing thoughtfully among the cabbage plots and lettuce-beds. I bowed my horned head before him and murmured these friendly words: "May old Jehovah protect you, sir. You know him well. Oh, how well you know him, and how perfectly you have understood his character!" The holy man thought he discerned in me a messenger from hell, concluded he was eternally damned, and died suddenly of fright.

'The following century was the century of philosophy. The spirit of research was developed, reverence was lost; the pride of the flesh was diminished and the mind acquired fresh energy. Manners took on an elegance until then unknown. On the other hand, the monks of my Order grew more and more ignorant and dirty, and the monastery no longer offered me any advantage now that good manners

reigned in the town. I could bear it no longer. Flinging my habit to the nettles, I put a powdered wig on my horned brow, hid my goat's legs under white stockings, and, cane in hand, my pockets stuffed with gazettes, I frequented the fashionable world, visited the modish promenades, and showed myself assiduously in the cafés where men of letters were to be found. I was made welcome in salons where, as a happy novelty, there were armchairs that fitted the form, and where both men and women engaged in rational conversation.

'The very metaphysicians spoke intelligibly. I acquired great weight in the town as an authority on matters of exegesis, and, without boasting, I was largely responsible for the testament of the Curé Meslier and *The Bible explained*, brought out by the chaplains to the King of Prussia.

'At this time a comic and cruel misadventure befell the ancient Iahveh. An American Quaker, by means of a kite, stole his thunderbolts.

'I was living in Paris, and was at the supper where they talked of strangling the last of the priests with the entrails of the last of the kings. France was in a ferment; a terrible revolution broke out. The ephemeral leaders of the disordered State carried on a reign of terror amidst unheard-of perils. They were, for the most part, less pitiless and less cruel than the princes and judges instituted by Iahveh in the kingdoms of the earth; nevertheless, they appeared more ferocious, because they gave judgment in the name of humanity. Unhappily they were easily moved to pity and of great sensibility. Now men of sensibility are irritable and subject to fits of fury. They were virtuous; they had moral laws, that is to say, they conceived certain narrowly defined moral obligations, and judged human actions not by their natural consequences but by abstract principles. Of all the vices which contribute to the undoing of a statesman, virtue is the most fatal; it leads to murder. To work effectively for the happiness of mankind, a man must be superior to all morals, like the divine Julius. God, so ill-used for some time past, did not, on the whole, suffer excessively harsh treatment from these new men. He found protectors among them, and was

adored under the name of the Supreme Being. One might even go so far as to say that terror created a diversion from philosophy and was profitable to the old demiurge, in that he appeared to represent order, public tranquillity, and the security of person and property.

'While liberty was coming to birth amid the storm, I lived at Auteuil, and visited Madame Helvetius, where freethinkers in every branch of intellectual activity were to be met with. Nothing could be rarer than a freethinker, even after Voltaire's day. A man who will face death without trembling dare not say anything out of the ordinary about mortals. That very same respect for humanity which prompts him to go forth to his death, makes him bow to public opinion. In those days I enjoyed listening to the talk of Volney, Cabanis, and Tracy. Disciples of the great Condillac, they regarded the senses as the origin of all our knowledge. They called themselves ideologists, were the most honourable people in the world, and angered the vulgar minds by refusing them immortality. For the majority of people, though they do not know what to do with this life, long for another that shall have no end. During the turmoil, our small philosophical society was sometimes disturbed in the peaceful shades of Auteuil by patrols of patriots. Condorcet, our great man, was an outlaw. I myself was regarded as suspect by the friends of the people, who, in spite of my rustic appearance and my frieze coat, believed me to be an aristocrat, and I confess that independence of thought is the proudest of all aristocracies.

'One evening while I was stealthily watching the dryads of Boulogne, who gleamed amid the leaves like the moon rising above the horizon, I was arrested as a suspect and put in prison. It was a pure misunderstanding; but the Jacobins of those days, like the monks whose place they had usurped, laid great stress on unity of obedience. After the death of Madame Helvetius our society gathered together in the salon of Madame de Condorcet. Bonaparte did not disdain to chat with us sometimes.

'Recognizing him to be a great man, we thought him an ideologist like ourselves. Our influence in the land

was considerable. We used it in his favour, and urged him towards the imperial throne, thinking to display to the world a second Marcus Aurelius. We counted on him to establish universal peace; he did not fulfil our expectations, and we were wrong-headed enough to be wroth with him for our own mistake.

'Without any doubt he greatly surpassed all other men in quickness of intelligence, depth of dissimulation, and capacity for action. What made him an accomplished ruler was that he lived entirely in the present moment, and had no thoughts for anything beyond the immediate and actual reality. His genius was far-reaching and agile; his intelligence, vast in extent, but common and vulgar in character, embraced humanity, but did not rise above it. He thought what every grenadier in the army thought; but he thought it with unprecedented force. He loved the game of chance, and it pleased him to tempt fortune by urging pigmies in their hundreds and thousands against each other. It was the game of a child as big as the world. He was too wily not to introduce old Iahveh into the game —Iahveh, who was still powerful on earth, and who resembled him in his spirit of violence and domination. He threatened him, flattered him, caressed him, and intimidated him. He imprisoned his vicar, of whom he demanded, with the knife at his throat, that rite of unction which, since the days of Saul of old, has bestowed might upon kings; he restored the worship of the demiurge, sang *Te Deums* to him, and made himself known through him as God of the earth, in small catechisms scattered broadcast throughout the empire. They united their thunders, and a fine uproar they made.

'While Napoleon's amusements were throwing Europe into a turmoil, we congratulated ourselves on our wisdom, a little sad, withal, at seeing the era of philosophy ushered in with massacre, torture, and war. The worst is that the children of the century, fallen into the most distressing disorder, formed the conception of a literary and picturesque Christianity, which betokened a degeneracy of mind really unbelievable, and finally fell into Romanticism. War and Romanticism, what terrible scourges! And how

pitiful to see these same people nursing a childish and savage love for muskets and drums! They did not understand that war, which trained the courage and founded the cities of barbarous and ignorant men, brings to the victor himself but ruin and misery, and is nothing but a horrible and stupid crime when nations are united together by common bonds of art, science, and trade.

'Insane Europeans who plot to cut each others' throats, now that one and the same civilization enfolds and unites them all!

'I renounced all converse with these madmen and withdrew to this village, where I devoted myself to gardening. The peaches in my orchard remind me of the sun-kissed skin of the Maenads. For mankind I have retained my old friendship, a little admiration, and much pity, and I await, while cultivating this enclosure, that still distant day when the great Dionysus shall come, followed by his Fauns and his Bacchantes, to restore beauty and gladness to the world, and bring back the Golden Age. I shall fare joyously behind his car. And who knows if in that day of triumph mankind will be there for us to see? Who knows whether their worn-out race will not have already fulfilled its destiny, and whether other beings will not rise upon the ashes and ruins of what once was man and his genius? Who knows if winged beings will not have taken possession of the terrestrial empire? Even then the work of the good demons will not be ended—they will teach a winged race arts and the joy of life.'

XXII

Wherein we are shown the interior of a bric-à-brac shop, and see how Père Guinardon's guilty happiness is marred by the jealousy of a love-lorn dame.

PÈRE GUINARDON (as Zéphyrine had faithfully reported to Monsieur Sariette) smuggled out the pictures, furniture, and curios stored in his attic in the rue Princesse—his studio he called it—and used them to stock a shop he had taken in the rue de Courcelles. Thither he went to take

up his abode, leaving Zéphyrine, with whom he had lived for fifty years, without a bed or a saucepan or a penny to call her own, except eighteenpence the poor creature had in her purse. Père Guinardon opened an old picture and curiosity shop, and in it he installed the fair Octavie.

The shop front presented an attractive appearance: there were Flemish angels in green copes, after the manner of Gérard David, a Salome of the Luini school, a St Barbara in painted wood of French workmanship, Limoges enamel-work, Bohemian and Venetian glass, dishes from Urbino. There were specimens of English point lace which, if her tale was true, had been presented to Zéphyrine, in the days of her radiant girlhood, by the Emperor Napoleon III. Within, there were golden articles that glinted in the shadows, while pictures of Christ, the Apostles, high-bred dames, and nymphs also presented themselves to the gaze. There was one canvas that was turned face to the wall so that it should only be looked at by connoisseurs; and connoisseurs are scarce. It was a replica of Fragonard's 'Gimblette,' a brilliant painting that looked as if it had barely had time to dry. Papa Guinardon himself remarked on the fact. At the far end of the shop was a kingwood cabinet, the drawers of which were full of all manner of treasures: water-colours by Baudouin, eighteenth-century books of illustrations, miniatures, and so forth.

But the real masterpiece, the marvel, the gem, the pearl of great price, stood upon an easel veiled from public view. It was a 'Coronation of the Virgin' by Fra Angelico, an exquisitely delicate thing in gold and blue and pink. Old Guinardon was asking a hundred thousand francs for it. Upon a Louis XV chair beside an empire work-table on which stood a vase of flowers, sat the fair Octavie, broidery in hand. She, having left her glistering rags behind her in the garret in the rue Princesse, no longer presented the appearance of a touched-up Rembrandt, but shone, rather, with the soft radiance and limpidity of a Vermeer of Delft, for the delectation of the connoisseurs who frequented the shop of Papa Guinardon. Tranquil and demure, she remained alone in the shop all day, while the old fellow

himself was up aloft working away at the deuce knows what picture. About five o'clock he used to come downstairs and have a chat with the *habitués* of the establishment.

The most regular caller was the Comte Desmaisons, a thin, cadaverous man. A strand of hair issued from the deep hollow under each cheekbone, and, broadening as it descended, shed upon his chin and chest torrents of snow, in which he was for ever trailing his long, fleshless, gold-ringed fingers. For twenty years he had been mourning the loss of his wife, who had been carried off by consumption in the flower of her youth and beauty. Since then he had spent his whole life in endeavouring to hold converse with the dead and in filling his lonely mansion with second-rate paintings. His confidence in Guinardon knew no bounds. Another client who was a scarcely less frequent visitor to the shop was Monsieur Blancmesnil, a director of a large financial establishment. He was a florid, prosperous-looking man of fifty. He took no great interest in matters of art, and was perhaps an indifferent connoisseur, but, in his case, it was the fair Octavie, seated in the middle of the shop, like a song-bird in its cage, that offered the attraction.

Monsieur Blancmesnil soon established relations with her, a fact which Père Guinardon alone failed to perceive, for the old fellow was still young in his love affair with Octavie. Monsieur Gaétan d'Esparvieu used to pay occasional visits to Père Guinardon's shop out of mere curiosity, for he strongly suspected the old man of being a first-rate 'faker.'

And then that doughty swordsman, Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffec, also came to see the old antiquary on one occasion, and acquainted him with a plan he had on foot. Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffec was getting up a little historical exhibition of small arms at the Petit Palais in aid of the fund for the education of the native children in Morocco, and wanted Père Guinardon to lend him a few of the most valuable articles in his collection.

'Our first idea,' he said, 'was to organize an exhibition to be called "The Cross and the Sword." The juxtaposition of these two words will make the idea which has

prompted our undertaking sufficiently clear to you. It was an idea pre-eminently patriotic and Christian which led us to associate the Sword, which is the symbol of Honour, with the Cross, which is the symbol of Salvation. It was hoped that our work would be graced by the distinguished patronage of the Minister for War and Monseigneur Cachepot. Unfortunately there were difficulties in the way, and the full realization of the project had to be deferred. In the meantime we are limiting our exhibition to the Sword. I have drawn up an explanatory note indicating the significance of the demonstration.'

Having delivered himself of these remarks, Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffed produced a pocket case stuffed full of papers. Picking out from a medley of judgment summonses and other odds and ends a little piece of very crumpled paper, he exclaimed: 'Ah, here it is,' and proceeded to read as follows: '"The Sword is a fierce virgin; it is *par excellence* the Frenchman's weapon. And now, when patriotic sentiment, after suffering an all too protracted eclipse, is beginning to shine forth again more ardently than ever . . ." and so forth; you see?'

And he repeated his request for some really fine specimen to be placed in the most conspicuous position in the exhibition to be held on behalf of the little native children of Morocco, of which General d'Esparvieu was to be honorary president.

Arms and armour were by no means Père Guinardon's strong point. He dealt principally in pictures, drawings, and books. But he was never to be taken unawares. He took down a rapier with a gilt colander-like hilt, a highly typical piece of workmanship of the Louis XIII—Napoleon III period, and presented it to the exhibition promoter, who, while contemplating it with respect, maintained a diplomatic silence.

'I have something better still in here,' said the antiquary, and he produced from his inner shop, where it had been lying among the walking-sticks and umbrellas, a real demon of a sword, adorned with fleurs-de-lis, a genuine royal relic. It was the sword of Philippe-Auguste as worn by an actor at the Odéon when *Agnès de Méranie* was being

performed in 1846. Guinardon held it point downwards, as though it were a cross, clasping his hands piously on the cross-bar. He looked as loyal as the sword itself.

'Have her for your exhibition,' said he. 'The damsel is well worth it. Bouvines is her name.'

'If I find a buyer for it,' said Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffec, twirling his enormous mustachios, 'I suppose you will allow me a little commission?'

Some days later Père Guinardon was mysteriously displaying a picture to the Comte Desmaisons and Monsieur Blancmesnil. It was a newly discovered work of El Greco, an amazingly fine example of the master's later style. It represented a Saint Francis of Assisi standing erect upon Mount Alverno. He was mounting heavenward like a column of smoke, and was plunging into the regions of the clouds a monstrously narrow head that the distance rendered smaller still. In fine it was a real, very real, nay, too real El Greco. The two collectors were attentively scrutinizing the work, while Père Guinardon was belauding the depth of the shadows and the sublimity of the expression. He was raising his arms aloft to convey an idea of the greatness of Theotocopuli, who, deriving from Tintoretto, surpassed that master in loftiness by a hundred cubits.

'He was chaste, and pure, and strong; a mystic, a visionary.'

Comte Desmaisons declared that El Greco was his favourite painter. In his inmost heart Blancmesnil was not so entirely struck with the work.

The door opened, and Monsieur Gaétan quite unexpectedly appeared on the scene.

He gave a glance at the Saint Francis, and said:

'Bless my soul!'

Monsieur Blancmesnil, anxious to improve his knowledge, asked him what he thought of this artist who was now so much in vogue. Gaétan replied, glibly enough, that he did not regard El Greco as the eccentric, the madman that people used to take him for. It was rather his opinion that a defect of vision from which Theotocopuli suffered compelled him to deform his figures.

'Being afflicted with astigmatism and strabismus,'

Gaétan went on, 'he painted the things he saw exactly as he saw them.'

Comte Desmaisons was not readily disposed to accept so natural an explanation, which, however, by its very simplicity, highly commended itself to Monsieur Blancmesnil.

Père Guinardon, quite beside himself, exclaimed:

'Are you going to tell me, Monsieur d'Esparvieu, that Saint John was astigmatic because he beheld a woman clothed with the sun, crowned with stars, with the moon about her feet; the beast with seven heads and ten horns, and the seven angels robed in white linen that bore the seven cups filled with the wrath of the Living God?'

'After all,' said Monsieur Gaétan, by way of conclusion, 'people are right in admiring El Greco if he had genius enough to impose his morbidity of vision upon them. By the same token, the contortions to which he subjects the human form may give satisfaction to those who love suffering—a class more numerous than is generally supposed.

'Monsieur,' replied the Comte Desmaisons, stroking his luxuriant beard with his long, thin hand, 'we must love those that love us. Suffering loves us and attaches itself to us. We must love it if life is to be supportable to us. In the knowledge of this truth lies the strength and value of Christianity. Alas! I do not possess the gift of faith. It is that which drives me to despair.'

The old man thought of her for whom he had been mourning twenty years, and forthwith his reason left him, and his thoughts abandoned themselves unresistingly to the morbid imaginings of gentle and melancholy madness.

Having, he said, made a study of psychic matters, and having, with the co-operation of a favourable medium, carried out experiments concerning the nature and duration of the soul, he had obtained some remarkable results, which, however, did not afford him complete satisfaction. He had succeeded in viewing the soul of his dead wife under the appearance of a transparent and gelatinous mass which bore not the slightest resemblance to his adored one. The most painful part about the whole experiment—which he had repeated over and over again—was that the gelatinous mass, which was furnished with a number of ex-

tremely slender tentacles, maintained them in constant motion in time to a rhythm apparently intended to make certain signs, but of what these movements were supposed to convey there was not the slightest indication.

During the whole of this narrative Monsieur Blancmesnil had been whispering in a corner with the youthful Octavie, who sat mute and still, with her eyes on the ground.

Now Zéphyrine had by no means made up her mind to resign her lover into the hands of an unworthy rival. She would often go round of a morning, with her shopping basket on her arm, and prowl about outside the curio shop. Torn betwixt grief and rage, tormented by warring ideas, she sometimes thought she would empty a saucepanful of vitriol on the head of the faithless one; at others that she would fling herself at his feet, and shower tears and kisses on his precious hands. One day, as she was thus eyeing her Michel—her beloved but guilty Michel—she noticed through the window the fair and youthful Octavie, who was sitting with her embroidery at a table upon which, in a vase of crystal, a rose was swooning to death. Zéphyrine, in a transport of fury, brought down her umbrella on her rival's fair head, and called her a bitch and a trollop. Octavie fled in terror, and ran for the police, while Zéphyrine, beside herself with grief and love, kept digging away with her old gamp at the 'Gimblette' of Fragonard, the fuliginous Saint Francis of El Greco, the virgins, the nymphs, and the apostles, and knocked the gilt off the Fra Angelico, shrieking all the while:

'All those pictures there, the El Greco, the Beato Angelico, the Fragonard, the Gérard David, and the Baudouins —Guinardon painted the whole lot of them himself, the wretch, the scoundrel! That Fra Angelico there, why I saw him painting it on my ironing board, and that Gérard David he executed on an old midwife's sign board. You and that bitch of yours, why, I 'll do for the pair of you just as I 'm doing for these pictures.'

And tugging away at the coat of an aged collector who trembling all over, had hidden himself in the darkest corner of the shop, she called him to witness to the crimes of Guinardon, perjurer and impostor. The police had simply

to tear her out of the ruined shop. As she was being taken off to the station, followed by a great crowd of people, she raised her fiery eyes to heaven, crying in a voice choked with sobs:

'But don't you know Michel? If you knew him, you would understand that it is impossible to live without him. Michel! He is handsome, and good, and charming. He is a very god. He is Love itself. I love him! I love him! I love him! I have known men high up in the world—dukes, ministers of state, and higher still. Not one of them was worthy to clean the mud off Michel's boots. My good, kind sirs, give him back to me again.'

XXIII

Wherein we are permitted to observe the admirable character of Bouchotte, who resists violence but yields to love. After that let no one call the author a misogynist.

On coming away from the Baron Everdingen's, Prince Istar went to have a few oysters and a bottle of white wine at an eating-house in the market. Then, being prudent as well as powerful, he paid a visit to his friend, Théophile Belais, for his pockets were full of bombs, and he wanted to secrete them in the musician's cupboard. The composer of *Aline, Queen of Golconda*, was not at home. However, the kerûb found Bouchotte before the wardrobe mirror, busily working up the role of Zigouille; for the young artiste was booked to play the principal part in *Les Apaches*, an operetta that was then being rehearsed in one of the big music halls. The part in question was that of a street walker, who, by her obscene gestures, lures a passer-by into a trap, and then, while her victim is being gagged and bound, repeats with fiendish cruelty the lascivious motions by which he had been led astray. The part required that she should appear both as mime and singer, and she was in a state of high enthusiasm about it.

The accompanist had just left. Prince Istar seated himself at the piano, and Bouchotte resumed her task. Her movements were unseemly and delicious. She had nothing on but a short skirt and a chemise, the strap of which had

slipped on to her right arm, revealing an armpit shadowy and tufted like a sacred grove in Arcady. Her tawny hair was flying in all directions in wild disordered curls; her skin was moist, it exhaled a scent of violets and alkaline salts which made the nostrils throb; even she herself felt the intoxication. Suddenly, inebriated with her intoxicating presence, Prince Istar arose, and with never a word or a look, caught her into his arms and drew her on to the couch, the little couch with the flowered tapestry which Théophile had procured at one of the big shops by promising to pay ten francs a month for a long term of years. The kerûb fell like a lump of rock on that delicate body; his breath resounded like the bellows of a forge, and his enormous hands cupped the kissed flesh. Now Istar might have solicited Bouchotte's favours; he might have invited her to a rapid, and, withal, a mutual embrace, and, despite her preoccupation and excitement, she would not have refused him. But Bouchotte was a girl of spirit. The merest hint of coercion awoke all her untamable pride. She would consent of her own accord, yes; but be mastered, never! She would readily yield to love, curiosity, pity, to less than that even, but she would die rather than yield to force. Her surprise immediately gave place to fury. She fought her aggressor with all her heart and soul. With nails, to which fury lent an added edge, she tore at the cheeks and eyelids of the kerûb, and, though he held her as in a vice, she arched herself so stiffly and made such excellent play with knee and elbow, that the human-headed bull, blinded with blood and rage, was sent crashing into the piano which gave forth a prolonged groan, while the bombs, tumbling out of his pockets, fell on the floor with a noise like thunder. And Bouchotte, with dishevelled locks, and one breast bare, beautiful and terrible, stood brandishing the poker over the prostrate giant, crying:

'Be off with you or I 'll put your eyes out!'

Prince Istar went to wash himself in the kitchen, and plunged his gory visage into a basin where some haricot beans lay soaking; then he withdrew without anger or resentment, for he had a noble soul.

Scarcely had he gone when the door bell rang. Bouchotte,

calling upon the absent maid in vain, slipped on a dressing-gown and opened the door herself. A young man, very correct in appearance and rather good-looking, bowed politely, and apologizing for having to introduce himself, gave his name. It was Maurice d'Esparvieu.

Maurice was still seeking his guardian angel. Upheld by a desperate hope, he sought him in the queerest places. He inquired for him at the houses of sorcerers, magicians, and thaumaturgists, who in filthy hovels lay bare the ineffable secrets of the future, and who, though masters of all the treasures of the earth, wear trousers without any seats to them, and eat pigs' brains. That very day, having been to a back street in Montmartre to consult a priest of Satan, who practised black magic by piercing waxen images, Maurice had gone on to Bouchotte's, having been sent by Madame de la Verdelière, who, being about to give a fête in aid of the fund for the preservation of country churches, was anxious to secure Bouchotte's services, since she had suddenly become—no one knew why—a fashionable artiste.

Bouchotte invited the visitor to sit down on the little flowered couch; at his request she seated herself beside him, and our young man of fashion explained to the singer what Madame de la Verdelière desired of her. The lady wished Bouchotte to sing one of those *apache* songs which were giving such delight in the fashionable world. Unfortunately, Madame de la Verdelière could only offer a very modest fee, one out of all proportion to the merits of the artiste, but then it was for a good cause.

Bouchotte agreed to take part, and accepted the reduced fee with the accustomed liberality of the poor towards the rich and of artists towards society poeple. Bouchotte was not a selfish girl; the work for the preservation of country churches interested her. She remembered with sobs and tears her first communion, and she still retained her faith. When she passed by a church she wanted to enter it, especially in the evening. And so she did not love the Republic which had done its utmost to destroy both the Church and the Army. Her heart rejoiced to see the rebirth of national sentiment. France was lifting up her

head. What were most applauded in the music halls were songs about the soldiers and the kind nuns. Meanwhile Maurice inhaled the odour of her tawny hair, the subtle, bitter perfume of her body, all the odours of her person, and desire grew in him. He felt her near him on the little couch, very warm and very soft. He complimented the artist on her great talent. She asked him what he liked best in all her repertory. He knew nothing about it, still he made replies that satisfied her. She had dictated them herself without knowing it. The vain creature spoke of her talent, of her success, as she wished others to speak of them. She never ceased talking of her triumphs, yet withal she was candour itself. Maurice in all sincerity praised Bouchotte's beauty, her fresh skin, her purity of line. She attributed this advantage to the fact that she never made up and never 'put messes on her face.' As to her figure, she admitted that there was enough everywhere and none too much, and to illustrate this assertion she passed her hands over all the contours of her charming body, rising lightly to follow the delightful curves on which she reposed.

Maurice was quite moved by it. It began to grow dark; she offered to light up. He begged her to do nothing of the sort.

Their talk, at first gay and full of laughter, grew more intimate and very sweet, with a certain languor in its tone. It seemed to Bouchotte that she had known Monsieur Maurice d'Esparvieu for a long time, and holding him for a man of delicacy, she gave him her confidence. She told him that she was by nature a good woman, but that she had had a grasping and unscrupulous mother. Maurice recalled her to the consideration of her own beauty, and exalted by subtle flattery the excellent opinion she had of herself. Patient and calculating, in spite of the burning desire growing in him, he aroused and increased in the desired one the longing to be still further admired. The dressing-gown opened, and slipped down of its own accord, the living satin of her shoulders gleamed in the mysterious light of evening. He—so prudent, so clever, so adroit—let her sink in his arms, ardent and half swooning before she had even perceived she had granted anything at all.

Their breath and their murmurs intermingled. And the little flowery couch sighed in sympathy with them.

When they recovered the power to express their feelings in words, she whispered in his ear that his cheek was even softer than her own.

He answered, holding her embraced:

'It is charming to hold you like this. One would think you had no bones.'

She replied, closing her eyes:

'It is because I love you. Love seems to dissolve my bones; it makes me as soft and melting as a pig's foot *à la Ste Menehould.*

Hereupon Théophile came in, and Bouchotte called upon him to thank Monsieur Maurice d'Esparvieu, who had been amiable enough to be the bearer of a handsome offer from Madame la Comtesse de la Verdelière.

The musician was happy, feeling the quiet and peace of the house after a day of fruitless applications, of colourless lessons, of failure and humiliation. Three new collaborators had been thrust upon him who would add their signatures to his on his operetta, and receive their share of the author's rights, and he had been told to introduce the tango into the court of Golconda. He pressed young d'Esparvieu's hand and dropped wearily on to the little couch, which, being now at the end of its strength, gave way at all four legs and suddenly collapsed.

And the angel, precipitated to the ground, rolled terror-struck on to the watch, match box, and cigarette case that had fallen from Maurice's pocket, and on to the bombs Prince Istar had left behind him.

XXIV

Containing an account of the vicissitudes that befell the Lucretius of the Prior de Vendôme.

LÉGER-MASSIEU, successor to Léger senior, the binder, whose establishment was in the rue de l'Abbaye, opposite the old mansion of the Abbés of Saint Germain-des-Prés, in the hotbed of ancient schools and learned societies, em-

ployed an excellent but by no means numerous staff of workmen, and served with leisurely deliberation a clientèle who had learned to practise the virtue of patience. Six weeks had elapsed since he had received the parcel of books that had been dispatched by Monsieur Sariette, but still Léger-Massieu had not yet put the work in hand. It was not until fifty-three days had come and gone, that, after calling over the books against the list that had been drawn up by Monsieur Sariette, the binder gave them out to his workmen. The little Lucretius with the Prior de Vendôme's arms not being mentioned on the list, it was assumed that it had been sent by another customer. And as it did not figure on any list of goods received it remained shut up in a cupboard, from which Léger-Massieu's son, the youthful Ernest, one day surreptitiously abstracted it, and slipped it into his pocket. Ernest was in love with a neighbouring seamstress whose name was Rose. Rose was fond of the country, and liked to hear the birds singing in the woods, and in order to procure the wherewithal to take her to Chatou one Sunday and give her a dinner, Ernest parted with the Lucretius for ten francs to old Moranger, a second-hand dealer in the rue Saint X——, who displayed no great curiosity regarding the origin of his acquisitions. Old Moranger handed over the volume, the very same day, to Monsieur Poussard, an expert in books, of the faubourg Saint Germain, for sixty francs. The latter removed the stamp which disclosed the ownership of the matchless copy, and sold it for five hundred francs to Monsieur Joseph Meyer, the well-known collector, who handed it straight away for three thousand francs to Monsieur Ardon, the bookseller, who immediately transferred it to Monsieur R——, the great Parisian bibliopolist, who gave six thousand for it, and sold it again a fortnight later at a handsome profit to Madame la Comtesse de Gorce. Well known in the higher ranks of Parisian society, the lady in question is what was called in the seventeenth century a 'curieuse,' that is to say, a lover, of pictures, books, and china. In her mansion in the avenue d'Iéna she possesses collections of works of art which bear witness to the diversity of her knowledge and

the excellence of her taste. During the month of July, while the Comtesse de Gorce was away at her château at Sarville, in Normandy, the house in the avenue d'Iéna, being unoccupied, was visited one night by a thief said to belong to a gang known as 'The Collectors,' who made works of art the special objects of their raids.

The police inquiry elicited the fact that the marauder had reached the first floor by means of the waste pipe, that he had then climbed over the balcony, forced a shutter with a jemmy, broken a pane of glass, turned the window fastener, and made his way into the long gallery. There he broke open several cupboards and possessed himself of whatever took his fancy. His booty consisted for the most part of small but valuable articles, such as gold caskets, a few ivory carvings of the fourteenth century, two splendid fifteenth-century manuscripts, and a volume which the countess's secretary briefly described as 'a morocco-bound book with a coat of arms on it,' and which was none other than the Lucretius from the d'Esparvieu library.

The malefactor, who was supposed to be an English cook, was never discovered. But, two months or so after the theft, a well-dressed, clean-shaven young man passed down the rue de Courcelles, in the dimness of twilight, and went to offer the Prior de Vendôme's Lucretius to Père Guinardon. The antiquary gave him five francs for it, examined it carefully, recognized its interest and its beauty, and put it in the kingwood cabinet, where he kept his special treasures.

Such were the vicissitudes which, in the course of a single season, befell this thing of beauty.

XXV

Wherein Maurice finds his angel again.

THE performance was over. Bouchotte in her dressing-room was taking off her make-up, when the door opened softly, and old Monsieur Sandraque, her protector, came in, followed by a troop of her other admirers. Without

so much as turning her head, she asked them what they meant by coming and staring at her like a pack of imbeciles, and whether they thought they were in a tent at the Neuilly Fair, looking at the freak woman.

'Now then, ladies and gentlemen,' she rattled on derisively, 'just put a penny in the box for the young lady's marriage portion, and she 'll let you feel her legs — they 're like marble!'

Then with an angry glance at the admiring throng she exclaimed: 'Come, off you go! Look alive!'

She sent them all packing, her sweetheart Théophile among them—the pale-faced, long-haired, gentle, melancholy, short-sighted, and dreamy Théophile.

But recognizing her little Maurice, she gave him a smile. He approached her, and leaning over the back of the chair on which she was seated, congratulated her on her playing and singing, duly performing a kiss at the end of every compliment. She did not let him escape thus, and with reiterated inquiries, pressing solicitations, feigned incredulity, obliged him to repeat his stock panegyrics three or four times over, and when he stopped she seemed so disappointed that he was forced to take up the strain again immediately. He found it trying, for he was no connoisseur, but he had the pleasure of kissing her plump curved shoulders all golden in the light, and of catching glimpses of her pretty face in the mirror over the toilet table.

'You were delicious.'

'Really? . . . you think so?'

'Adorable, div——'

Suddenly he gave a loud cry. His eyes had seen in the mirror a face appear at the back of the dressing-room. He turned swiftly round, flung his arms about Arcade, and drew him into the corridor.

'What manners!' exclaimed Bouchotte, gasping.

But, pushing his way through a troop of performing dogs and a family of American acrobats, young d'Esparvieu dragged his angel towards the exit.

He hurried him forth into the cool darkness of the boulevard, delirious with joy and wondering whether it was all too good to be true.

'Here you are!' he cried; 'here you are! I have been looking for you a long time, Arcade—or Mirar if you like—and I have found you at last. Arcade, you have taken my guardian angel from me. Give him back to me. Arcade, do you love me still?'

Arcade replied that in accomplishing the superangelic task he had set himself he had been forced to crush under foot friendship, pity, love, and all those feelings which tend to soften the soul; but that, on the other hand, his new state, by exposing him to suffering and privation, disposed him to love humanity, and that he felt a certain mechanical friendship for his poor Maurice.

'Well, then,' exclaimed Maurice, 'if only you love me, come back to me, stay with me. I cannot do without you. While I had you with me I was not aware of your presence. But no sooner did you depart than I felt a horrible blank. Without you I am like a body without a soul. Do you know that in the little flat in the rue de Rome, with Gilberte by my side, I feel lonely, I miss you sorely, and long to see you and to hear you as I did that day when you made me so angry. Confess I was right, and that your behaviour on that occasion was not that of a gentleman. That you, you of so high an origin, so noble a mind, could commit such an indiscretion is extraordinary, when one comes to think about it. Madame des Aubels has not yet forgiven you. She blames you for having frightened her by appearing at such an inconvenient moment, and for being insolent and forward while hooking her dress and tying her shoes. I, I have forgotten everything. I only remember that you are my celestial brother, the saintly companion of my childhood. No, Arcade, you must not, you cannot leave me. You are my angel; you are my property.'

Arcade explained to young d'Esparvieu that he could no longer be guiding angel to a Christian, having himself gone down into the pit. And he painted a horrible picture of himself; he described himself as breathing hatred and fury; in fact, an infernal spirit.

'All nonsense!' said Maurice, smiling, his eyes big with tears.

'Alas! our ideas, our destiny, everything tends to part us, Maurice. But I cannot stifle the tenderness I feel for you, and your candour forces me to love you.'

'No,' sighed Maurice. 'You do not love me. You have never loved me. In a brother or a sister such indifference would be natural; in a friend it would be ordinary; in a guardian angel it is monstrous. Arcade, you are an abominable being. I hate you.'

'I have loved you dearly, Maurice, and I still love you. You trouble my heart which I deemed encased in triple bronze. You show me my own weakness. When you were a little innocent boy I loved you more tenderly and purely than Miss Kate, your English governess, who caressed you so lustfully. In the country, when the thin bark of the plane-trees peels off in long strips and discloses the tender green trunk, after the rains which make the fine sand run on the sloping paths, I showed you how with that sand, those strips of bark, a few wild flowers, and a spray of maidenhair fern, to make rustic bridges, rustic shelters, terraces, and those gardens of Adonis which last but an hour. During the month of May in Paris we raised an altar to the Virgin, and we burnt incense before it, the scent of which, permeating all the house, reminded Marcelline, the cook, of her village church and her lost innocence, and drew from her floods of tears; it also gave your mother a headache, your mother who, with all her wealth, was crushed with the ennui that is common to the fortunate ones of this world. When you went to college I interested myself in your progress, I shared your work and your play, I pondered with you over arduous problems in arithmetic, I sought the impenetrable meaning of a sentence of Julius Caesar's. What fine games of prisoners' base and football we had together! More than once did we know the intoxication of victory, and our young laurels were not soaked in blood or tears. Maurice, I did all I could to protect your innocence, but I could not prevent your losing it at the age of fourteen. Afterwards I regretfully saw you loving women of all sorts, of divers ages, not all beautiful, at least in the eyes of an angel. Saddened at the sight, I devoted myself to study; a fine library offered me

resources rarely met with. I delved into the history of religions; you know the rest.'

'But now, my dear Arcade,' concluded young d'Esparvieu, 'you have lost your position, your situation, you are entirely without resource. You have lost caste, you are off the lines, a vagabond, a barefooted wanderer.'

The Angel replied bitterly that, after all, he was a little better clad at present than when he was wearing the slops of a suicide.

Maurice alleged in excuse that when he dressed his naked angel in a suicide's slops, he was irritated with that angel's infidelity. But it was useless to dwell on the past or to recriminate. What was really needful was to consider what steps to take in future.

And he asked:

'Arcade, what do you think of doing?'

'Have I not already told you, Maurice? To fight with Him who reigns in the heavens, dethrone Him, and set up Satan in His stead.'

'You will not do it. To begin with, it is not the opportune moment. Opinion is not with you. You will not be in the swim, as papa says. Conservatism and authority are all the go nowadays. We like to be ruled, and the President of the Republic is going to parley with the Pope. Do not be obstinate, Arcade. You are not as bad as you say. At bottom you are like the rest of the world, you adore the good God.'

'I thought I had already explained to you, Maurice, that He whom you consider God is actually but a demiurge. He is absolutely ignorant of the divine world above Him, and in all good faith believes Himself to be the true and only God. You will find in the *History of the Church*, by Monsignor Duchesne—vol. i, page 162—that this proud and narrow-minded demiurge is named Ialdabaoth. My child, so as not to ruffle your prejudices and to deal gently with your feelings in future, that is the name I shall give Him. If it should happen that I should speak of Him to you, I shall call Him Ialdabaoth. I must leave you. Adieu.'

'Stay——'

'I cannot.'

'I shall not let you go thus. You have deprived me of my guardian angel. It is for you to repair the injury you have caused me. Give me another one.'

Arcade objected that it was difficult for him to satisfy such a demand. That having quarrelled with the sovereign dispenser of guardian spirits, he could obtain nothing from that quarter.

'My dear Maurice,' he added, smiling, 'ask for one yourself from Ialdabaoth.'

'No, no, no!' exclaimed Maurice. 'You have taken away my guardian angel—give him back to me.'

'Alas! I cannot.'

'Is it, Arcade, because you are a revolutionary that you cannot?'

'Yes.'

'An enemy of God?'

'Yes.'

'A Satanic spirit?'

'Yes.'

'Well, then,' exclaimed young Maurice, 'I will be your guardian angel. I will not leave you.'

And Maurice d'Esparvieu took Arcade to have some oysters at P—'s.

XXVI

The conclave.

THAT day, convoked by Arcade and Zita, the rebellious angels met together on the banks of the Seine at La Jonchère, in a deserted and tumbledown entertainment hall that Prince Istar had hired from a pot-house keeper called Barattan. Three hundred angels crowded together in the stalls and boxes. A table, an arm-chair, and a collection of small chairs were arranged on the stage, where hung the tattered remnants of a piece of rustic scenery. The walls, painted in distemper with flowers and fruit, were cracked and stained with damp, and were crumbling away in flakes. The vulgar and poverty-stricken appearance of

the place rendered the grandeur of the passions exhibited therein all the more striking.

When Prince Istar asked the assembly to form its committee, and first of all to elect a president, the name that was renowned throughout the world entered the minds of all present, but a religious respect sealed their lips; and after a moment's silence, the absent Nectaire was elected by acclamation. Having been invited to take the chair between Zita and an angel of Japan, Arcade immediately began as follows:

'Sons of heaven! My comrades! You have freed yourselves from the bonds of celestial servitude; you have shaken off the thrall of Him called Iahveh, but to whom we should here accord his veritable name of Ialdabaoth, for He is not the Creator of the worlds, but merely an ignorant and barbarous demiurge, who having obtained possession of a minute portion of the universe has therein sown suffering and death. Sons of heaven, tell me, I charge you, whether you will combat and destroy Ialdabaoth?'

All with one voice made answer:

'We will!'

And many speaking all together swore they would scale the mountain of Ialdabaoth, and hurl down the walls of jasper and porphyry, and plunge the tyrant of heaven into eternal darkness.

But a voice of crystal pierced through the sullen murmur.

'Tremble, ye impious, sacrilegious madmen! The Lord hath already lifted His dread arm to smite you!'

It was a loyal angel who, with an impulse of faith and love, envying the glory of confessors and martyrs, jealous and eager, like his God Himself, to emulate man in the beauty of sacrifice, had flung himself in the midst of the blasphemers, to brave them, to confound them, and to fall beneath their blows. The assembly turned upon him with furious unanimity. Those nearest to him overwhelmed him with blows. He continued to cry, in a clear, ringing voice: 'Glory to God! Glory to God! Glory to God!'

A rebel seized him by the neck and strangled his praises of the Almighty in his throat. He was thrown to the ground, trampled underfoot. Prince Istar picked him up,

took him by the wings between his fingers, then rising like a column of smoke, opened a ventilator which no one else could have reached, and passed the faithful angel through it. Order was immediately restored.

'Comrades,' continued Arcade, 'now that we have affirmed our stern resolve, we must examine the possible plans of campaign, and choose the best. You will therefore have to consider if we should attack the enemy in full force, or whether it were better, by a lengthy and assiduous propaganda, to win the inhabitants of heaven to our cause.'

'War! war!' shouted the assembled host.

And it seemed as if one could hear the sound of trumpets and the rolling of drums.

Théophile, whom Prince Istar had dragged to the meeting, rose, pale and unstrung, and, speaking with emotion, said:

'Brethren, do not take ill what I am about to say; for it is the friendship I have for you that inspires me. I am but a poor musician. But, believe me, all your plans will come to naught before the Divine Wisdom which has foreseen everything.'

Théophile Belais sat down amid hisses. And Arcade continued:

'Ialdabaoth foresees everything. I do not contest it. He foresees everything, but in order to leave us our free will He acts towards us absolutely as if He foresaw nothing. Every instant He is surprised, disconcerted; the most probable events take Him unawares. The obligation which He has undertaken to reconcile with His prescience the liberty of both men and angels, throws Him constantly into inextricable difficulties and terrible dilemmas. He never sees further than the end of His nose. He did not expect Adam's disobedience, and so little did He anticipate the wickedness of men that He repented having made them, and drowned them in the waters of the Flood, and all the animals as well, though He had no fault to find with the animals. For blindness He is only to be compared with Charles X, His favourite king. If we are prudent it will be easy to take Him by surprise. I think that these observations will be calculated to reassure my brother.'

Théophile made no reply. He loved God, but he was fearful of sharing the fate of the faithful angel.

One of the best-informed spirits of the assembly, Mammon, was not altogether reassured by the remarks of his brother, Arcade.

'Bethink you,' said this spirit, 'Ialdabaoth has little general culture, but He is a soldier—to the marrow of His bones. The organization of paradise is a thoroughly military organization. It is founded on hierarchy and discipline. Passive obedience is imposed there as a fundamental law. The angels form an army. Compare this spot with the Elysian Fields which Virgil depicts for you. In the Elysian Fields reign liberty, reason, and wisdom. The happy shades hold converse together in the groves of myrtle. In the heaven of Ialdabaoth there is no civil population. Every one is enrolled, numbered, registered. It is a barracks and a field of manœuvres. Remember that.'

Arcade replied that they must look at their adversary in His true colours, and that the military organization of paradise was far more reminiscent of the villages of King Koffee, than of the Prussia of Frederick the Great.

'Already,' said he, 'at the time of the first revolt, before the beginning of time, the conflict raged for two days, and Ialdabaoth's throne was made to totter. Nevertheless, the demiurge gained the victory. But to what did He owe it? To the thunderstorm which happened to come on during the conflict. The thunderbolts falling on Lucifer and his angels struck them down, bruised and blackened, and Ialdabaoth owed His victory to the thunderbolts. Thunder is His sole weapon. He abuses its power. In the midst of thunder and lightning He promulgates His laws. "Fire goeth before Him," says the prophet. Now Seneca, the philosopher, said that the thunderbolt in its fall brings peril to very few, but fear to all. This remark was true enough for men of the first century of the Christian era; it is no longer so for the angels of the twentieth; all of which goes to prove that, in spite of His thunder, He is not very powerful; it was acute terror that made men rear Him a tower of unbaked brick and bitumen. When myriads

of celestial spirits, furnished with machines which modern science puts at their disposal, make an assault upon the heavens, think you, comrades, that the old Master of the Solar System surrounded with His angels, armed as in the time of Abraham, will be able to resist them? To this day the warriors of the demiurge wear helmets of gold and shields of diamond. Michael, His best captain, knows no other tactics than the hand-to-hand combat. To him Pharaoh's chariots are still the latest thing, and he has never heard of the Macedonian phalanx.'

And young Arcade lengthily prolonged the parallel between the armed herds of Ialdabaoth and the intelligent fighting men of the rebel army. Then the question of pecuniary resources arose.

Zita asserted that there was enough money to commence war, that the electrophores were in order, that an initial victory would obtain them credit.

The discussion continued, amid turbulence and confusion. In this parliament of angels, as in the synods of men, empty words flowed in abundance. Disturbances grew more violent and more frequent as the time for putting the resolution drew near. It was beyond question that supreme command would be entrusted to him who had first raised the flag of revolt. But as every one aspired to act as Lucifer's lieutenant, each in describing the kind of fighting man to be preferred drew a portrait of himself. Thus Alcor, the youngest of the rebellious angels, arose and spoke rapidly as follows:

'In Ialdabaoth's army, happily for us, the officers obtain their posts by seniority. This being the case, there is little likelihood of the command falling into the hands of a military genius, for men are not made leaders by prolonged habits of obedience, and close attention to minutiae is not a good apprenticeship for the evolution of vast plans of campaign. If we consult ancient and modern history, we shall see that the greatest leaders were kings like Alexander and Frederick, aristocrats like Caesar and Turenne, or men impatient of red tape, like Bonaparte. A routine man will always be poor or second-rate. Comrades, let us appoint intelligent leaders, men in the prime of life, to command

us. An old man may retain the habit of winning victories, but only a young man can acquire it!'

Alcor then gave place to an angel of the philosophic order, who mounted the rostrum and spoke thus:

'War never was an exact science, a clearly defined art. The genius of the race or the brain of the individual has ever modified it. Now how are we to define the qualities necessary for a general in command in the war of the future, where one must consider greater masses and a larger number of movements than the intelligence of man can conceive? The multiplication of technical means, by infinitely multiplying the opportunities for mistake, paralyses the genius of those in command. At a certain stage in the progress of military science, a stage which our models, the Europeans, are about to reach, the cleverest leader and the most ignorant become equalized by reason of their incapacity. Another result of great modern armaments is, that the law of numbers tends to rule with inflexible rigour. It is, of course, true that ten angels in revolt are worth more than ten angels of Ialdabaoth; it is not at all certain that a million rebellious angels are worth more than a million of Ialdabaoth's angels. Great numbers, in war as elsewhere, annihilate intelligence and individual superiority in favour of a sort of exceedingly rudimentary collective soul.'

A buzz of conversation drowned the voice of the philosophic angel, and he concluded his speech in an atmosphere of general indifference.

The tribune then resounded with calls to arms and promises of victory. The sword was held up to praise, the sword which defends the right. The triumph of the angels in revolt was celebrated twenty times beforehand, to the plaudits of a delirious crowd.

Cries of 'War!' rose to the silent heavens; 'Give us war!'

In the midst of these transports Prince Istar hoisted himself on to the platform, and the floor creaked under his weight.

'Comrades,' said he, 'you wish for victory, and it is a very natural desire, but you must be rotten with literature and poetry if you expect to obtain it from war. The idea

of making war can nowadays only enter the brain of a sottish *bourgeois* or a belated Romantic. What is war? A burlesque masquerade in the midst of which fatuous patriots sing their stupid dithyrambs. Had Napoleon possessed a practical mind he would not have made war; but he was a dreamer, intoxicated with Ossian. You cry: "Give us war!" You are visionaries. When will you become thinkers? The thinkers do not look for power and strength from any of the dreams which constitute military art: tactics, strategy, fortifications, artillery, and all that rubbish. They do not believe in war, which is a fantasy; they believe in chemistry, which is a science. They know the way to put victory into an algebraic formula.'

And drawing from his pocket a small bottle, which he held up to the meeting, Prince Istar exclaimed:

'Victory—it is here!'

XXVII

Wherein we shall see revealed a dark and secret mystery and learn how it comes about that empires are often hurled against empires, and ruin falls alike upon the victors and the vanquished: and the wise reader (if such there be—which I doubt) will meditate upon this important utterance: 'War is a matter of business.'

THE angels had dispersed. At the foot of the slopes at Meudon, seated on the grass, Arcade and Zita watched the Seine flowing by the willows.

'In this world,' said Arcade, 'in this world, which we call a cosmos, though it is but a microcosm, no thinking being can imagine that he is able to destroy even one atom. At the utmost, all we can hope for is that we shall succeed in modifying, here and there, the rhythm of some group of atoms and the arrangement of certain cells. That, when one thinks of it, must be the limit of our great enterprise. And when we shall have set up the Adversary in the place of Ialdabaoth, we shall have done no more. . . . Zita, is the evil in the nature of things or in their arrangement? That is what we ought to know. Zita, I am profoundly troubled——'

'Arcade,' replied Zita, 'if to act we had to know the secret of nature, one would never act at all. And neither would one live—since to live is to act. Arcade, is your resolution failing you already?'

Arcade assured the beautiful angel that he was resolved to plunge the demiurge into eternal darkness.

A motor car came along the road, followed by a long trail of dust. It stopped before the two angels, and the hooked nose of Baron Everdingen appeared at the window.

'Good morning, my celestial friends, good morning,' said the capitalist. 'Sons of heaven, I am pleased to meet you. I have a word of importance to say to you. Do not remain idle—do not go to sleep. Arm! Arm! You may be surprised by Ialdabaoth. You have a big war fund. Employ it without stint. I have just learnt that the Archangel Michael has given large orders in heaven for thunderbolts and arrows. If you take my advice you will procure fifty thousand more electrophores. I will take the order. Good day, angels. Long live the celestial motherland!'

And Baron Everdingen flew towards the flowery banks of Louveciennes in the company of a pretty actress.

'Is it true that they are taking up arms at the demiurge's?' asked Arcade.

'It may be,' replied Zita, 'that up there another Baron Everdingen is inciting to arms.'

The guardian angel of young Maurice remained pensive for some moments. Then he murmured:

'Can it be that we are the sport of financiers?'

'Pooh!' said the beautiful archangel. 'War is a business. It has always been a business.'

Then they discussed at length the means of executing their immense enterprise. Rejecting disdainfully the anarchistic proceedings of Prince Istar, they conceived a formidable and sudden invasion of the kingdom of heaven by their enthusiastic and well-drilled troops.

Now Barattan, the innkeeper of La Jonchère, who had let the entertainment hall to the rebellious angels, was in the employ of the secret police. In the reports he furnished

to the prefecture he denounced the members of this secret meeting as meditating an attack on a certain person whom they described as obtuse and cruel, and whom they called Alaballotte. The agent believed this to be a pseudonym denoting either the President of the Republic or the Republic itself. The conspirators had unanimously given voice to threats against Alaballotte, and one of them, a very dangerous individual, well-known in anarchist circles, who had already several convictions against him on account of writings and speeches of a seditious nature, and who was known as Prince Istar or the Quéroube, had brandished a bomb of very small calibre which seemed to constitute a formidable machine. The other conspirators were unknown to Barattan, notwithstanding the fact that he frequented revolutionary circles. Many among them were very young men, mere beardless youths. There were two who, it appeared, had spoken with conspicuous vehemence: a certain Arcade, dwelling in the rue St Jacques, and a woman of easy virtue called Zita, living at Montmartre, both without visible means of subsistence.

The affair seemed sufficiently serious to the Prefect of Police to make him think it necessary to confer without delay with the President of the Council.

The Third Republic was then going through one of those climacteric periods during which the French nation, enamoured of authority and worshipping force, gave itself up for lost because it was not governed enough, and clamoured loudly for a saviour. The President of the Council, and Minister of Justice, was only too eager to be that longed-for saviour. Still, for him to play that part it was first necessary that there should be a danger to face. Thus the news of a plot was highly welcome to him. He questioned the Prefect of Police on the character and importance of the affair. The Prefect of Police explained that the people seemed to have money, intelligence, and energy; but that they talked too much and were too numerous to undertake secret and concerted action. The minister, leaning back in his arm-chair, pondered on the matter. The Empire writing table at which he was seated, the ancient tapestry which covered the walls, the clock and

the candelabra of the Restoration period — all, in this traditional setting, reminded him of those great principles of government which remain immutable throughout the succession of regimes, of stratagem, and of bluff. After brief reflection, he concluded that the plot must be allowed to grow and take shape, that it would even be fitting to nurse it, to embroider it, to colour it, and only to stifle it after having extracted every possible advantage from it.

He instructed the Prefect of Police to watch the affair closely, to render him an account of what went on from day to day, and to confine himself to the role of informer.

'I rely on your well-known prudence; observe, and do not intervene.'

The minister lit a cigarette. He quite reckoned, with the help of this plot, on silencing the opposition, strengthening his own influence, diminishing that of his colleagues, humiliating the President of the Republic, and becoming the saviour of his country.

The Prefect of Police undertook to follow the ministerial instructions, vowing inwardly all the while to act in his own way. He had a watch put upon the individuals pointed out by Barattan, and commanded his agents not to intervene, come what might. Perceiving that he was a marked man, Prince Istar—who united prudence with strength—withdrew the bombs from the gutter outside his window where he had hidden them, and changing from motor bus to tube, from tube to motor bus, and choosing the most cunningly circuitous route, at length deposited his machines with the angelic musician.

Every time he left his house in the rue St Jacques, Arcade found a man of exaggerated smartness at his door, with yellow gloves and in his tie a diamond bigger than the Regent. Being a stranger to the things of this world, the rebellious angel paid no attention to the circumstance. But young Maurice d'Esparvieu, who had undertaken the task of guarding his guardian angel, viewed this gentleman with uneasiness, for he equalled in assiduity and surpassed in vigilance that Monsieur Mignon who had formerly allowed his inquisitive gaze to wander from the rams' heads on the Hôtel de la Sordière in the rue Garancière to

the apse of the church of St Sulpice. Maurice came two and three times a day to see Arcade in his furnished rooms, warning him of the danger, and urging him to change his abode.

Every evening he took his angel to night restaurants, where they supped with ladies of easy virtue. There young d'Esparvieu would foretell the issue of some coming glove-fight, and afterwards exert himself to demonstrate to Arcade the existence of God, the necessity for religion, and the beauties of Christianity, and adjure him to renounce his impious and criminal undertakings wherefrom, he said, he would reap but bitterness and disappointment.

'For really,' said the young apologist, 'if Christianity were false it would be known.'

The ladies approved of Maurice's religious sentiments, and when the handsome Arcade uttered some blasphemy in language they could understand, they put their hands to their ears and made him be silent, for fear of being struck down with him. For they believed that God, in His omnipotence and sovereign goodness, taking sudden vengeance against those who insulted Him, was quite capable of striking down the innocent with the guilty without meaning it.

Sometimes the angel and his guardian took supper with the angelic musician. Maurice, who remembered from time to time that he was Bouchotte's lover, was displeased to see Arcade taking liberties with the singer. She had allowed him to do so ever since the day when, the angelic musician having had the little flowery couch repaired, Arcade and Bouchotte had made it a foundation for their friendship. Maurice, who loved Madame des Aubels a great deal, also loved Bouchotte a little, and was rather jealous of Arcade. Now jealousy is a feeling natural to man and beast, and causes them, however slight the attack, keen unhappiness. Therefore, suspecting the truth, which Bouchotte's temperament and the angel's character made sufficiently obvious, he overwhelmed Arcade with sarcasm and abuse, reproaching him with the immorality of his ways. Arcade answered tranquilly that it was difficult to

subject physiological impulses to perfectly defined rules, and that moralists encountered great difficulties in the case of certain natural necessities.

'Moreover,' added Arcade, 'I freely acknowledge that it is almost impossible systematically to constitute a natural moral law. Nature has no principles. She furnishes us with no reason to believe that human life is to be respected. Nature, in her indifference, makes no distinction between good and evil.'

'You see, then,' replied Maurice, 'that religion is necessary.'

'Moral law,' replied the Angel, 'which is supposed to be revealed to us, is drawn in reality from the grossest empiricism. Custom alone regulates morals. What heaven prescribes is merely the consecration of ancient customs. The divine law, promulgated amid fireworks on some Mount Sinai, is never anything but the codification of human prejudice. And from this fact—namely, that morals change—religions which endure for a long time, such as Judaeo-Christianity, vary their moral law.'

'At any rate,' said Maurice, whose intelligence was swelling visibly, 'you will grant me that religion prevents much profligacy and crime?'

'Except when it promotes crime—as, for instance, the murder of Iphigenia.'

'Arcade,' exclaimed Maurice, 'when I hear you argue, I rejoice that I am not an intellectual.'

Meanwhile Théophile, with his head bent over the piano, his face hidden by the long fair veil of his hair, bringing down from on high his inspired hands on to the keys, was playing and singing the entire score of *Aline, Queen of Golconda.*

Prince Istar used to come to their friendly reunions, his pockets filled with bombs and bottles of champagne, both of which he owed to the liberality of Baron Everdingen. Bouchotte received the kerûb with pleasure, since she saw in him the witness and the trophy of the victory she had gained on the little flowered couch. He was to her as the severed head of Goliath in the hands of the youthful David. And she admired the prince for his cleverness as

an accompanist, his vigour, which she had subdued, and his prodigious capacity for drink.

One night, when young d'Esparvieu took his angel home in his car from Bouchotte's house to the lodgings in the rue St Jacques, it was very dark; before the door the diamond in the spy's necktie glittered like a beacon; three cyclists standing in a group under its rays made off in different directions at the car's approach. The angel took no notice, but Maurice concluded that Arcade's movements interested various important people in the State. He judged the danger to be pressing, and at once made up his mind.

The next morning he came to seek the suspect to take him to the rue de Rome. The angel was in bed. Maurice urged him to dress and to follow him.

'Come,' said he. 'This house is no longer safe for you. You are watched. One of these days you will be arrested. Do you wish to sleep in gaol? No? Well, then, come. I will put you in a safe place.'

The spirit smiled with some little compassion on his naïve preserver.

'Do you not know,' he said, 'that an angel broke open the doors of the prison where Peter was confined, and delivered the apostle? Do you believe me, Maurice, to be inferior in power to that heavenly brother of mine, and do you suppose that I am unable to do for myself what he did for the fisherman of the lake of Tiberias?'

'Do not count on it, Arcade. He did it miraculously.'

'Or by a stroke of luck, as a modern historian of the Church has it. But no matter. I will follow you. Just allow me to burn a few letters and to make a parcel of some books I shall need.'

He threw some papers in the fire-place, put several volumes in his pockets, and followed his guide to the car which was waiting for them not far off, outside the College of France. Maurice took the wheel. Imitating the kerûb's prudence, he made so many windings and turnings and so many rapid twists that he put all the swift and numerous cyclists, speeding in pursuit, off the scent. At length, having left wheelmarks in every direction all over

the town, he stopped in the rue de Rome, before the ground-floor flat where the angel had first appeared.

On entering the dwelling which he had left eighteen months before to carry out his mission, Arcade remembered the irreparable past, and breathing in the scent used by Gilberte, his nostrils throbbed. He asked after Madame des Aubels.

'She is very well,' replied Maurice. 'A little plumper and very much more beautiful for it. She still bears you a grudge for your forward behaviour. I hope that she will one day forgive you, as I have forgiven you, and that she will forget your offence. But she is still very annoyed with you.'

Young d'Esparvieu did the honours of his flat to his angel with the manners of a well-bred man and the tender solicitude of a friend. He showed him the folding bed which was opened every evening in the entrance hall and pushed into a dark cupboard in the morning. He showed him the dressing-table, with its accessories; the bath, the linen cupboard, the chest of drawers; gave him the necessary information regarding the heating and lighting; told him that his meals would be brought and the rooms cleaned by the concierge, and showed him which bell to press when he required that person's services. He told him also that he must consider himself at home, and receive whom he wished.

XXVIII

Which treats of a painful domestic scene.

So long as Maurice confined his selection of mistresses to respectable women, his conduct had called forth no reproach. It was a different matter when he took up with Bouchotte. His mother, who had closed her eyes to liaisons which, though guilty, were elegant and discreet, was scandalized when it came to her ears that her son was openly parading about with a music-hall singer. By dint of much prying and probing, Berthe, Maurice's younger

sister, had got to know of her brother's adventures, and she narrated them, without any indignation, to her young girl friends. His little brother Léon declared to his mother one day, in the presence of several ladies, that when he was big he, too, would go on the spree, like Maurice. This was a sore wound to the maternal heart of Madame d'Esparvieu.

About the same time there occurred a family event of a very grave nature which occasioned much alarm to Monsieur René d'Esparvieu. Drafts were presented to him signed in his name by his son. His writing had not been forged, but there was no doubt that it had been the son's intention to pass off the signature as his father's. It showed a perverted moral sense; whence it appeared that Maurice was living a life of profligacy, that he was running into debt, and on the point of outraging the decencies. The paterfamilias talked the matter over with his wife. It was arranged that he should give his son a very severe lecture, hint at vigorous corrective measures, and that in due course the mother should appear with gentle and sorrowing mien and endeavour to soothe the righteous indignation of the father. This plan being agreed upon, Monsieur René d'Esparvieu sent for his son to come to him in his study. To add to the solemnity of the occasion, he had arrayed himself in his frock coat. As soon as Maurice saw it he knew there was something serious in the wind. The head of the family was pale, and his voice shook a little (for he was a nervous man), as he declared that he would no longer put up with his son's irregular behaviour, and insisted on an immediate and absolute reform. No more wild courses, no more running into debt, no more undesirable companions, but work, steadiness, and reputable connections.

Maurice was quite willing to give a respectful reply to his father, whose complaints, after all, were perfectly justified; but, unfortunately, Maurice, like his father, was shy, and the frock coat which Monsieur d'Esparvieu had donned in order to discharge his magisterial duty with greater dignity seemed to preclude the possibility of any open and unconstrained intercourse. Maurice maintained

an awkward silence, which looked very much like insolence, and this silence compelled Monsieur d'Esparvieu to reiterate his complaints, this time with additional severity. He opened one of the drawers in his historic bureau (the bureau on which Alexandre d'Esparvieu had written his *Essay on the Civil and Religious Institutions of the World*), and produced the bills which Maurice had signed.

'Do you know, my boy,' said he, 'that this is nothing more nor less than forgery? To make up for such grave misconduct as that——'

At this moment Madame d'Esparvieu, as arranged, entered the room attired in her walking dress. She was supposed to play the angel of forgiveness, but neither her appearance nor her disposition was suitable to the part. She was harsh and unsympathetic. Maurice harboured within him the seeds of all the ordinary and necessary virtues. He loved his mother and respected her. His love, however, was more a matter of duty than of inclination, and his respect arose from habit rather than from feeling. Madame René d'Esparvieu's complexion was blotchy and, having powdered herself in order to appear to advantage at the domestic tribunal, the colour of her face suggested raspberries sprinkled over with sugar. Maurice, being possessed of some taste, could not help realizing that she was ugly and rather repulsively so. He was out of tune with her, and when she began to go through all the accusations his father had brought against him, making them out to be blacker than ever, the prodigal turned away his head to conceal his irritation.

'Your Aunt de Saint-Fain,' she went on, 'met you in the street in such disgraceful company that she was really thankful that you forbore to greet her.'

'Aunt de Saint-Fain!' Maurice broke out. 'I like to hear her talking about scandals! Every one knows the sort of life she has led, and now the old hypocrite wants to——'

He stopped. He had caught sight of his father, whose face was even more eloquent of sorrow than of anger. Maurice began to feel as though he had committed murder, and could not imagine how he had allowed such words to escape him. He was on the point of bursting into tears,

falling on his knees, and imploring his father to forgive him, when his mother, looking up at the ceiling, said with a sigh:

'What offence can I have committed against God to have brought such a wicked son into the world?'

This speech struck Maurice as a piece of ridiculous affectation, and it pulled him up with a jerk. The bitterness of contrition suddenly gave place to the delicious arrogance of wrong-doing. He plunged wildly into a torrent of insolence and revolt, and breathlessly delivered himself of utterances quite unfit for a mother's ear.

'If you will have it mamma, rather than forbid me to continue my friendship with a talented lyrical artist, you would be better employed in preventing my elder sister, Madame de Margy, from appearing, night after night, in society and at the theatres with a contemptible and disgusting individual that everybody knows is her lover. You should also keep an eye on my little sister Jeanne, who writes objectionable letters to herself in a disguised hand, and then, pretending she has found them in her prayer book, shows them to you with assumed innocence to worry and alarm you. It would be just as well, too, if you prevented my little brother Léon, a child of seven, from perpetrating the latest violences on Mademoiselle Caporal, and you might tell your maid——'

'Get out, sir, I will not have you in the house!' cried Monsieur René d'Esparvieu, white with anger, pointing a trembling finger at the door.

XXIX

Wherein we see how the angel, having become a man, behaves like a man, coveting another's wife and betraying his friend. In this chapter the correctness of young d'Esparvieu's conduct will be made manifest.

THE angel was pleased with his lodging. He worked of a morning, went out in the afternoon, heedless of detectives, and came home to sleep. As in days gone by, Maurice received Madame des Aubels twice or thrice a week in the room in which they had seen the apparition.

All went very well until one morning Gilberte, having, the night before, left her little velvet bag on the table in the blue room, came to find it, and discovered Arcade stretched on the couch in his pyjamas, smoking a cigarette, and dreaming of the conquest of heaven. She gave a loud scream.

'You, monsieur! Had I thought to find you here, you may be quite sure I should not . . . I came to fetch my little bag, which is in the next room. Allow me. . . .' And she slipped past the angel, cautiously and quickly, as if he were a brazier.

Madame des Aubels that morning, in her pale green tailor-made costume, was deliciously attractive. Her tight skirt displayed her movements, and her every step was one of those miracles of nature which fill men's hearts with amazement.

She reappeared, bag in hand.

'Once more I ask your pardon. . . . I never dreamt that . . .'

Arcade begged her to sit down and to stay a moment.

'I never expected, monsieur,' said she, 'that you would be doing the honours of this flat. I knew how dearly Monsieur d'Esparvieu loved you. . . . Nevertheless, I had no idea that . . .'

The sky had suddenly grown overcast. A brownish glare began to steal into the room. Madame des Aubels told him she had walked for her health's sake, but a storm was brewing; and she asked if a carriage could be called for her.

Arcade flung himself at Gilberte's feet, took her in his arms as one takes a precious piece of china, and murmured words which, being meaningless in themselves, expressed desire.

She put her hands over his eyes and on his lips, and exclaimed: 'I hate you!'

And shaking with sobs, she asked for a drink of water. She was choking. The angel helped her to loosen her dress. In this moment of extreme peril she defended herself courageously. She kept saying: 'No! . . . No! . . . I will not love you. I should love you too well. . . .' Nevertheless she succumbed.

In the sweet familiarity which followed their mutual astonishment she said to him:

'I have often asked after you. I knew that you were an assiduous frequenter of the playhouses at Montmartre—that you were often seen with Mademoiselle Bouchotte, who, nevertheless, is not at all pretty. I knew that you had become very smart, and that you were making a good deal of money. I was not surprised. You were born to succeed. The day of your'—and she pointed at the spot between the window and the wardrobe with the mirror—'apparition, I was vexed with Maurice for having given you a suicide's rags to wear. You pleased me. . . . Oh, it was not your good looks! Don't think that women are as sensitive as people say to outward attractions. We consider other things in love. There is a sort of . . . Well, anyhow I loved you as soon as I saw you.'

The shadows grew deeper.

She asked:

'You are not an angel, are you? Maurice believes you are; but he believes so many things, Maurice.' She questioned Arcade with her eyes and smiled maliciously. 'Confess that you have been fooling him, and that you are no angel.'

Arcade replied:

'I only aspire to please you; I will always be what you want me to be.'

Gilberte decided that he was no angel; first, because one never is an angel; secondly, for more detailed reasons which drew her thoughts to the question of love. He did not argue the matter with her, and once again words were found inadequate to express their feelings.

Outside, the rain was falling thick and fast, the windows were streaming, lightning lit up the muslin curtains, and thunder shook the panes. Gilberte made the sign of the cross, and remained with her head hidden in her lover's bosom.

At this moment Maurice entered the room. He came in wet and smiling, confident, tranquil, happy, to announce to Arcade the good news that with his half share in the previous day's race at Longchamps the angel had won

twelve times his stake. Surprising the lady and the angel in their embrace, he became furious; anger gripped the muscles of his throat, his face grew red with blood and the veins stood out on his forehead. He sprang with clenched fists towards Gilberte, and then suddenly stopped.

Interrupted motion was transformed into heat. Maurice fumed. His anger did not arm him, like Archilochus, with lyrical vengeance. He merely applied an offensive epithet to his unfaithful one.

Meanwhile she had recovered her dignified bearing. She rose, full of modesty and grace, and gave her accuser a look which expressed both offended virtue and loving forgiveness.

But as young d'Esparvieu continued to shower coarse and monotonous insults on her, she grew angry in her turn.

'You are a pretty sort of person, are you not?' she said. 'Did I run after this Arcade of yours? It was you who brought him here, and in what a state, too! You had only one idea: to give me up to your friend. Well, monsieur, you can do as you like, I am not going to oblige you.'

Maurice d'Esparvieu replied simply: 'Get out of it, you trollop!' And he made a motion as if to push her out. It pained Arcade to see his mistress treated so disrespectfully, but he thought he lacked the necessary authority to interfere with Maurice. Madame des Aubels, who had lost none of her dignity, fixed young d'Esparvieu with her imperious gaze, and said:

'Go and get me a carriage.'

And so great is the power of woman over a well-bred soul, in a gallant nation, that the young Frenchman went immediately and told the concierge to call a taxi. Madame des Aubels, with a studied exhibition of charm in every movement, took leave of them, throwing Maurice the contemptuous look that a woman owes to him whom she has deceived. Maurice witnessed her departure with an outward expression of indifference he was far from feeling. Then he turned to the angel clad in the flowered pyjamas which Maurice himself had worn the day of the apparition; and this circumstance, trifling in itself, added fuel to the anger of the host who had been thus shamefully deceived.

'Well,' he said, 'you may pride yourself on being a

despicable individual. You have behaved basely, and all for nothing. If the woman took your fancy, you had but to tell me. I was tired of her. I had had enough of her. I would have willingly left her to you.'

He spoke thus to hide his pain, for he loved Gilberte more than ever, and the creature's treachery caused him great suffering. He pursued:

'I was about to ask you to take her off my hands. But you have followed your lower nature—you have behaved like a sweep.'

If at this solemn moment Arcade had but spoken one word from his heart, Maurice would have burst into tears, and forgiven his friend and his mistress, and all three would have become content and happy once again. But Arcade had not been nourished on the milk of human kindness. He had never suffered, and did not know how to sympathize with suffering. He replied with frigid wisdom:

'My dear Maurice, that same necessity which orders and constrains the actions of living beings, produces effects that are often unexpected, and sometimes absurd. Thus it is that I have been led to displease you. You would not reproach me if you had a good philosophical understanding of nature; for you would then know that free will is but an illusion, and that physiological affinities are as exactly determined as are chemical combinations, and, like them, may be summed up in a formula. I think that, in your case, it might be possible to inculcate these truths, but it would be a difficult task, and maybe they would not bring you the serenity which eludes you. It is fitting, therefore, that I should leave this spot, and——'

'Stay,' said Maurice.

Maurice had a very clear sense of social obligations. He put honour, when he thought about it, above everything. So now he told himself very forcibly that the outrage he had suffered could only be wiped out with blood. This traditional idea instantly lent an unexpected nobility to his speech and bearing.

'It is I, monsieur,' said he, 'who will quit this place, never to return. You will remain here, since you are a refugee. My seconds will wait upon you.'

The angel smiled.

'I will receive them, if it gives you pleasure, but, bethink you, my dear Maurice, I am invulnerable. Celestial spirits even when they are materialized cannot be touched by point of sword or pistol shot. Consider, my dear Maurice, the awkward situation in which this fatal inequality puts me, and realize that in refusing to appoint seconds I cannot give as a reason my celestial nature—it would be unprecedented.'

'Monsieur,' replied the heir of the Bussarts d'Esparvieu, 'you should have thought of that before you insulted me.'

Out he marched haughtily; but no sooner was he in the street than he staggered like a drunken man. The rain was still falling. He walked unseeing, unhearing, at haphazard, dragging his feet in the gutters through pools of water, through heaps of mud. He followed the outer boulevards for a long time, and at length, fordone with weariness, lay down on the edge of a piece of waste land. He was muddied up to the eyes, mud and tears smeared his face, the brim of his hat was dripping with rain. A passer-by, taking him for a beggar, tossed him a copper. He picked it up, put it carefully in his waistcoat pocket, and set off to find his seconds.

XXX

Which treats of an affair of honour, and which will afford the reader an opportunity of judging whether, as Arcade affirms, the experience of our faults makes better men and women of us.

THE ground chosen for the combat was Colonel Manchon's garden, on the boulevard de la Reine at Versailles. Messieurs de la Verdelière and Le Truc de Ruffec, who had both of them constant practice in affairs of honour and knew the rules with great exactness, assisted Maurice d'Esparvieu. No duel was ever fought in the Catholic world without Monsieur de la Verdelière being present and, in making application to this swordsman, Maurice

had conformed to custom, though not without a certain reluctance, for he had been notorious as the lover of Madame de la Verdelière; but Monsieur de la Verdelière was not to be looked upon as a husband. He was an institution. As to Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffec, honour was his only known profession, and avowedly his sole resource, and when the matter was made the subject of ill-natured comment in society, the question was asked what finer career than that of honour Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffec could possibly have adopted. Arcade's seconds were Prince Istar and Théophile. The celestial musician had not voluntarily nor with a good grace taken a hand in this affair. He had a horror of every kind of violence and disapproved of single combat. The report of pistols and the clash of swords were intolerable to him, and the sight of blood made him faint. This gentle son of heaven had obstinately refused to act as second to his brother Arcade, and to bring him to the starting point the kerûb had had to threaten to break a bottle of panclastite over his head.

Besides the combatants, the seconds, and the doctors, the only people in the garden were a few officers from the barracks at Versailles and several reporters. Although young d'Esparvieu was known merely as a young man of family, and Arcade had never been heard of at all, the duel had attracted quite a large crowd of inquisitive individuals, and the windows of the adjoining houses were crammed with photographers, reporters, and society people. What had aroused much curiosity was that a woman was known to be the cause of the quarrel. Many mentioned Bouchotte, but the majority said it was Madame des Aubels. It had been remarked upon, moreover, that duels in which Monsieur de la Verdelière acted as second drew all Paris.

The sky was a soft blue, the garden all abloom with roses, a blackbird was piping in a tree. Monsieur de la Verdelière, who, stick in hand, conducted the affair, laid the points of the swords together, and said:

'Allez, messieurs.'

Maurice d'Esparvieu attacked by doubling and beating the blade. Arcade retired, keeping his sword in line. The first engagement was without result. The seconds

were under the impression that Monsieur d'Esparvieu was in a grievous state of nervous irritability, and that his adversary would wear him down. In the second encounter Maurice attacked wildly, spread out his arms, and exposed his breast. He attacked as he advanced, gave a straight thrust, and the point of his sword grazed Arcade on the shoulder. The latter was thought to be wounded. But the seconds ascertained with surprise that it was Maurice who had received a scratch on the wrist. Maurice asserted that he felt nothing, and Dr Quille declared, after examination, that his client might continue the fight. After the regulation quarter of an hour the duel was resumed. Maurice attacked with fury. His adversary was obviously nursing him, and, what disturbed Monsieur de la Verdelière, seemed to be paying very little attention to his own defence. At the opening of the fifth bout, a black spaniel that had got into the garden, no one knew how, rushed out from a clump of rose-bushes, made its way on to the space reserved for the combatants, and, in spite of sticks and cries, ran in between Maurice's legs. The latter seemed as though his arm were benumbed, merely gave a shoulder thrust at his invulnerable opponent. He then delivered a straight lunge and impaled his arm on his adversary's sword, which made a deep wound just below the elbow.

Monsieur de la Verdelière stopped the fight, which had lasted an hour and a half. Maurice was conscious of a painful shock. They laid him down on a grassy bank against a wall covered with wistaria. While the surgeon was dressing the wound, Maurice called Arcade and offered him his wounded hand. And when the victor, saddened with his victory, advanced, Maurice embraced him tenderly, saying:

'Be generous, Arcade, forgive me for my part in your treachery. Now that we have fought, I can ask you to be reconciled with me.'

He embraced his friend, weeping, and whispered in his ear:

'Come and see me, and bring Gilberte.'

Maurice, who was still unreconciled with his parents,

was taken to the little flat in the rue de Rome. No sooner was he stretched on the bed at the far end of the bedroom where the curtains were drawn as on the day of the apparition, than he saw Arcade and Gilberte appear. He began to suffer greatly from his wound; his temperature was rising, but he was at peace, happy, and contented. Angel and woman, both in tears, threw themselves at the foot of the bed. He took both their hands with his left, smiled on them, and kissed them tenderly.

'I am sure now that I shall never quarrel with either of you again; you will deceive me no more. I now know you are capable of anything.'

Gilberte, weeping, swore that Maurice had been misled by appearances, that she had never betrayed him with Arcade, that she had never betrayed him at all. And in a great gush of sincerity she persuaded herself that this was so.

'You wrong yourself, Gilberte,' replied the wounded man. 'It did happen; it had to. And it is well. Gilberte, you were basely false to me with my best friend in this very room, and you were right. If you had not been we should not be here, reunited, all three of us, and I should not be at your side tasting the greatest happiness of my life. Oh, Gilberte, how wrong of you to deny a perfect and accomplished fact!'

'If you wish, my friend,' replied Gilberte, a little acidly, 'I will not deny it. But it will only be to please you.'

Maurice made her sit down on the bed, and begged Arcade to be seated in the arm-chair.

'My friend,' said Arcade, 'I was innocent. I became man. Straightway I did evil. Then I became better.'

'Do not let us exaggerate things,' said Maurice. 'Let 's have a game of bridge.'

Scarcely, however, had the patient seen three aces in his hand and called 'no trumps,' than his eyes began to swim, the cards slipped from his fingers, his head fell heavily back on the pillow, and he complained of a violent headache. Almost immediately, Madame des Aubels went off to pay some calls, for she made a point of appearing in society, in order that the calmness and confidence of her

demeanour might give the lie to the various rumours that were current concerning her. Arcade saw her to the door, and, with a kiss, inhaled from her a delicate perfume which he brought back with him into the room where Maurice lay dozing.

'I am perfectly content,' murmured the latter, 'that things should have happened as they have.'

'It was bound to be so,' answered the spirit. 'All the other angels in revolt would have done as I did with Gilberte. "Women," said the apostle, "should pray with their heads covered, because of the angels," and the apostle speaks thus because he knows that the angels are disturbed when they look upon them and see that they are beautiful. No sooner do they touch the earth than they desire to embrace mortal women and fulfil their desire. Their clasp is full of strength and sweetness, they hold the secret of those ineffable caresses which plunge the daughters of men into unfathomable depths of delight. Laying upon the lips of their happy victims a honey that burns like fire, making their veins flow with torrents of refreshing flames, they leave them crushed and enraptured.'

'Stop your clatter, you unclean beast!' cried the wounded one.

'One word more!' said the Angel; 'just one other word, my dear Maurice, to bear out what I say, and I will let you rest quietly. There 's nothing like having sound references. In order to assure yourself that I am not deceiving you, Maurice, on this subject of the amorous embraces of angels and women, look up Justin, *Apologies*, I and II; Flavius Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book I, Chapter III; Athenagoras, *Concerning the Resurrection*; Lactantius, Book II, Chapter XV; Tertullian, *On the Veil of the Virgins*; Marcus of Epheus in Psellus; Eusebius, *Praeparatio Evangelica*, Book V, Chapter IV; Saint Ambrose, in his book on *Noah and the Ark*, Chapter V; Saint Augustine, in his *City of God*, Book XV, Chapter XXIII; Father Meldonat, the Jesuit, *Treatise on Demons*, page 248; Pierre Lebyer, the King's Counsellor——'

'Arcade, please, for pity's sake, be quiet; do, please do, and send this dog away,' cried Maurice, whose face was

burning, and whose eyes were starting from his head; for in his delirium he thought he saw a black spaniel on his bed.

Madame de la Verdelière, who was assiduous in every modish and patriotic practice, was reckoned, in the best French society, as one of the most gracious of the great ladies interested in good works. She came herself to ask for news of Maurice, and offered to nurse the wounded man. But, at the vehement instigation of Madame des Aubels, Arcade shut the door in her face. Expressions of sympathy were showered upon Maurice. Piled on the salver, visiting cards displayed their innumerable little dogs'-ears. Monsieur Le Truc de Ruffec was one of the first to show his manly sympathy at the flat in the rue de Rome, and, holding out his loyal hand, asked young d'Esparvieu as one honourable man to another for twenty-five louis to pay a debt of honour.

'Of course, my dear Maurice, that is the sort of thing one could not ask of everybody.'

The same day Monsieur Gaétan came to press his nephew's hand. The latter introduced Arcade.

'This is my guardian angel, whose foot you thought so beautiful when you saw the print it had made on the tell-tale powder, uncle. He appeared to me last year in this very room. You don't believe it? Well, it is true, nevertheless.'

Then turning towards the spirit he said:

'What say you, Arcade? The Abbé Patouille, who is a great theologian and a good priest, does not believe that you are an angel; and Uncle Gaétan, who doesn't know his catechism, and hasn't a scrap of religion in him, doesn't think so either. They deny you, the pair of them; the one because he has faith, the other because he hasn't. After that you may be sure that your history, if ever it comes to be narrated, will scarcely appear credible. Moreover, the man that took it into his head to tell your story would not be a man of taste, and would not come in for much approval. For your story is not a pretty one. I love you, but I sit in judgment upon you, too. Since you fell into atheism, you have become an abominable scoundrel. A bad angel, a bad friend, a traitor, and a homicide,

for I suppose it was to bring about my death that you sent that black spaniel between my legs on the duelling ground.'

The angel shrugged his shoulders and, addressing Gaétan, said:

'Alas! monsieur, I am not surprised at finding little credit in your eyes. I have been told that you have fallen out with the Judaeo-Christian heaven which is where I came from.'

'Monsieur,' answered Gaétan, 'my faith in Jehovah is not sufficiently strong to enable me to believe in His angels.'

'Monsieur, He whom you call Jehovah is really a coarse and ignorant demiurge, and His name is Ialdabaoth.'

'In that case, monsieur, I am perfectly ready to believe in Him. He is a narrow-minded ignoramus, is He? Then belief in His existence offers me no further difficulty. How is He getting on?'

'Badly! We are going to lay Him low next month.'

'Don't make too sure of that, monsieur. You remind me of my brother-in-law, Cuissart, who has been expecting to hear of the fall of the Republic for the past thirty years.'

'You see, Arcade,' exclaimed Maurice, 'Uncle Gaétan thinks as I do. He knows you won't succeed.'

'And, pray, Monsieur Gaétan, what makes you think I shall not succeed?'

'Your Ialdabaoth is still very powerful in this world if He isn't in the other. In days gone by He used to be upheld by His priests, by those who believed in Him. Now He is supported by those who do not believe in Him, by the philosophers. A pedant of a fellow called Picrochole has recently come on the scene who wants to make a bankrupt of science in order to do a good turn to the Church. And just lately Pragmatism has been invented for the express purpose of gaining credit for religion in the minds of rationalists.'

'You have been studying Pragmatism?'

'Not I! I was frivolous once, and went in for metaphysics. I read Hegel and Kant. I have become serious with years, and now I only trouble myself about things evident to the senses: what the eye can see or what the

ear can hear. Man is summed up in Art. All the rest is moonshine.'

Thus the conversation went on until evening; it was marked by obscenities that would have brought a blush, I will not say to a cuirassier, for cuirassiers are frequently chaste, but even to a Parisienne.

Monsieur Sariette came to see his old pupil. When he entered the room the bust of Alexandre d'Esparvieu seemed to take shape behind the librarian's bald head. He drew near the bed. In the place of blue curtains, mirrored wardrobe, and chimney-piece, there straightway came into view the heavy-laden bookcases of the room of the globes and busts, and the air was heavy with piles of papers, records, and files. Monsieur Sariette could not be dissociated from his library; one could not conceive of him or even see him apart from it. He himself was paler, more vague, more shadowy, and more a creature of the fancy than the fancies he evoked.

Maurice, who had grown very quiet, was sensible of this mark of friendship.

'Sit down, Monsieur Sariette—you know Madame des Aubels. May I introduce Arcade to you—my guardian angel. It was he who, while yet invisible, pillaged your library for two years, made you lose all desire for food and drink, and drove you to the verge of madness. He it was who moved piles of books from the room of the busts to my summer-house one day; under your very nose, he took away I know not what precious volumes, and was the cause of your falling on the staircase; another day he took a volume of Salomon Reinach's, and, forced to go out with me (for he never left me, as I have learnt later), he let the volume drop in the gutter of the rue Princesse. Forgive him, Monsieur Sariette—he had no pockets. He was invisible. I bitterly regret, Monsieur Sariette, that all your old books were not devoured by fire or swallowed up by a flood. They made my angel lose his head. He became man, and now knows neither faith nor obedience to laws. It is I, now, who am his guardian angel. God knows how it will all end.'

While listening to this speech Monsieur Sariette's face

took on an expression of infinite, irreparable, eternal sadness; the sadness of a mummy. Rising to take his leave, the sorrowful librarian murmured in Arcade's ear:

'The poor child is very ill. He is delirious.'

Maurice called the old man back.

'Do stay, Monsieur Sariette. You shall have a game of bridge with us. Monsieur Sariette, listen to my advice. Do not do as I did—do not keep bad company. You will be lost. I shudder at the mere thought. Monsieur Sariette, do not go yet. I have something very important to ask you. When you come again bring me a book on the truth of religion so that I may study it. I must restore to my guardian angel the faith which he has lost.'

XXXI

Wherein we are led to marvel at the readiness with which an honest man of timid and gentle nature can commit a horrible crime.

PROFOUNDLY distressed by the dark utterances of young Maurice, Monsieur Sariette took a motor omnibus and went to see Père Guinardon, his friend, his only friend, the one person in the whole world whom it gave him pleasure to see and hear. When Monsieur Sariette entered the shop in the rue de Courcelles, Guinardon was alone, dozing in the depths of an antique arm-chair. His face, surrounded by his curly hair and luxuriant beard, was crimson in hue. Little violet filaments spread a network about the fleshy part of his nose, to which the wines of Burgundy had imparted a purple tint; for there was no longer any disguising the fact, Père Guinardon drank. Two feet away from him, on the fair Octavie's work table, a rose, all but withered, drooped in an empty vase, and in a basket a piece of embroidery was lying unfinished and neglected. The young Octavie's absences from the shop were growing more and more frequent, and Monsieur Blancmesnil never called when she was not there. The reason of this was that they were meeting three times a week at five o'clock in a house close to the Champs Élysées. Père Guinardon

knew nothing of that. He did not know the full extent of his misfortune, but he suffered.

Monsieur Sariette shook his old friend by the hand; but he did not inquire for the young Octavie, for he refused to recognize the connection. He would sooner have talked about Zéphyrine, who had been so cruelly deserted, and whom he hoped the old man would make his lawful wife. But Monsieur Sariette was prudent. He contented himself with asking Guinardon how he was.

'Perfectly well,' was Guinardon's reply; but he felt ill, for either age and love-making had undermined his sturdy constitution, or else young Octavie's faithlessness had dealt her lover a fatal blow. 'God be praised,' he went on, 'I still retain my powers of mind and body. I am chaste. Be chaste, Sariette. Chastity is strength.'

That evening Père Guinardon had taken some specially valuable books out of the kingwood cabinet to show to a distinguished bibliophile, Monsieur Victor Meyer, and after the latter's departure he had dropped off to sleep without putting them back in their places. Books had an attraction for Monsieur Sariette, and seeing these particular volumes on the marble top of the cabinet, he began to examine them with interest. The first one he looked at was *La Pucelle*, in morocco, with the English continuation. Doubtless it pained his patriotic and Christian heart to admire its text and illustrations, but a good copy was always virtuous and pure in his sight. Continuing to chat very affectionately with Guinardon, he picked up, one by one, the books which the antiquary had, for one reason or another—binding, illustrations, distinguished ownership, or scarcity—added to his stock.

Suddenly a glorious shout of joy and love broke from his lips. He had discovered the Lucretius of the Prior de Vendôme, his Lucretius, and he was clasping it to his bosom.

'Once again I behold you,' he sighed, as he pressed it to his lips.

At first Père Guinardon could not quite make out what his old friend was talking about; but when the latter declared to him that the volume was from the d'Esparvieu collection, that it belonged to him, Sariette, and that he

was going to take it away without further ado, the antiquary completely woke up, got on his legs, declared emphatically that the book belonged to him, Guinardon, by right of true and lawful purchase, and that he would not part with it unless he got five thousand francs for it cash down.

'You don't take in what I am telling you,' answered Sariette. 'The book belongs to the d'Esparvieu library; I must restore it to its place.'

'Pas de ça, Lisette,' hummed Guinardon.

'The book belongs to me, I tell you!'

'You are crazy, my good Sariette!'

And noticing that, as a matter of fact, the librarian had a wandering look in his eye, he took the book from him, and tried to change the conversation.

'Have you seen, Sariette, that the rascals are going to rip up the Palais Mazarin, and cover up the very heart and centre of the Old Town, the finest and most venerable place in the whole of Paris, with the deuce knows what works of art of theirs? They are worse than the Vandals, for the Vandals, although they destroyed the buildings of antiquity, did not replace them with hideous and disgusting erections and atrocious bridges like the Pont d'Alexandre. And your poor rue Garancière, Sariette, has fallen a prey to the barbarians. What have they done with the pretty bronze mask of the palace fountain?'

Monsieur Sariette never listened to a word of all this.

'Guinardon, you have not understood me. Now listen. This book belongs to the d'Esparvieu library. It was taken away, how or by whom I know not. Dreadful and mysterious things went on in that library. But, anyhow, the book was stolen. I need scarcely appeal to your sentiments of scrupulous probity, my dear friend. You would not like to be regarded as the receiver of stolen goods. Give me the book. I will return it to Monsieur d'Esparvieu, who will duly requite you; of that you may be sure. Rely on his generosity, and you will be acting like the downright good fellow that you are.'

The antiquary smiled a bitter smile.

'Catch me relying on the generosity of that old curmudgeon of a d'Esparvieu. Why, he 'd skin a flea to get its coat. Look at me, Sariette, old boy, and tell me if I look like a dunderhead. You know perfectly well that d'Esparvieu refused to give fifty francs in a second-hand shop for a portrait of Alexandre d'Esparvieu, the founder of the family, by Hersent, and that consequently the founder of the family has had to remain on the boulevard Montparnasse, propped against a Jew hawker's stall, just opposite the cemetery, where all the dogs of the neighbourhood come and make water on him. Catch me trusting to Monsieur d'Esparvieu's liberality! You 've got some bright ideas in your head, you have!'

'Very well, Guinardon, I myself will undertake to pay you any indemnity that a board of arbitrators may fix upon. Do you hear?'

'Now don't go and do the handsome for people who won't give you so much as a thank you. This man, d'Esparvieu, has taken your knowledge, your energies, your whole life for a salary that even a valet wouldn't accept. So leave that idea alone. In any case, it is too late. The book is sold.

'Sold? To whom?' asked Sariette in agonized tones.

'What does that matter? You 'll never see it again. You 'll hear no more about it; it 's off to America.'

'To America! The Lucretius with the arms of Philippe de Vendôme and marginalia in Voltaire's own hand! My Lucretius off to America!'

Père Guinardon began to laugh.

'My dear Sariette, you remind me of the Chevalier des Grieux when he learns that his darling mistress is to be transported to the Mississippi. "My dear mistress going to the Mississippi!" says he.'

'No! no!' answered Sariette, very pale, 'this book shall not go to America. It shall return, as it ought, to the d'Esparvieu library. Let me have it, Guinardon.'

The antiquary made a second attempt to put an end to an interview that now looked as if it might take an ugly turn.

'My good Sariette, you haven't told me what you think

of my Greco. You never so much as glanced at it. It is an admirable piece of work all the same.'

And Guinardon, putting the picture in a good light, went on:

'Now just look at Saint Francis here, the poor man of the Lord, the brother of Jesus. See how his fuliginous body rises heavenward like the smoke from an agreeable sacrifice, like the sacrifice of Abel.'

'Give me the book, Guinardon,' said Sariette, without turning his head; 'give me the book.'

The blood suddenly flew to Père Guinardon's head.

'That 's enough of it,' he shouted, as red as a turkey-cock, the veins standing out on his forehead.

And he dropped the Lucretius into his jacket pocket.

Straightway old Sariette flew at the antiquary, assailed him with sudden fury, and, frail and weakly as he was, butted him back into young Octavie's arm-chair.

Guinardon, in furious amazement, belched forth the most horrible abuse on the old maniac and gave him a punch that sent him staggering back four paces against the 'Coronation of the Virgin,' by Fra Angelico, which fell down with a crash. Sariette returned to the charge, and tried to drag the book out of the pocket in which it lay hid. This time Père Guinardon would really have floored him had he not been blinded by the blood that was rushing to his head, and hit sideways at the work table of his absent mistress. Sariette fastened himself on to his bewildered adversary, held him down in the arm-chair, and with his little bony hands clutched him by the neck, which, red as it was already, became a deep crimson. Guinardon struggled to get free, but the little fingers, feeling the mass of soft, warm flesh about them, embedded themselves in it with delicious ecstasy. Some unknown force made them hold fast to their prey. Guinardon's throat began to rattle, saliva was oozing from one corner of his mouth. His enormous frame quivered now and again beneath the grasp; but the tremors grew more and more intermittent and spasmodic. At last they ceased. The murderous hands did not let go their hold. Sariette had to make a violent effort to loose them. His temples were buzzing.

Nevertheless he could hear the rain falling outside, muffled steps going past on the pavement, newspaper men shouting in the distance. He could see umbrellas passing along in the dim light. He drew the book from the dead man's pocket and fled.

The fair Octavie did not go back to the shop that night. She went to sleep in a little *entresol* underneath the bric-à-brac stores which Monsieur de Blancmesnil had recently bought for her in this same rue de Courcelles. The workman whose task it was to shut up the shop found the antiquary's body still warm. He called Madame Lenain, the concierge, who laid Guinardon on the couch, lit a couple of candles, put a sprig of box in a saucer of holy water, and closed the dead man's eyes. The doctor who was called in to certify the death ascribed it to apoplexy.

Zéphyrine, informed of what had happened by Madame Lenain, hastened to the house, and sat up all night with the body. The dead man looked as if he were sleeping. In the flickering light of the candles El Greco's Saint mounted upwards like a wreath of smoke, the gold of the Primitives gleamed in the shadows. Near the death-bed a little woman by Baudouin was plainly discernible giving herself a douche. All through the night Zéphyrine's lamentations could be heard fifty yards away.

'He 's dead, he 's dead!' she kept saying. 'My friend, my divinity, my all, my love—— But no! he is not dead, he moves. It is I, Michel; I, your Zéphyrine. Awake, hear me! Answer me; I love you; if ever I caused you pain, forgive me. Dead! dead! Oh, my God! See how beautiful he is. He was so good, so clever, so kind. My God! My God! My God! If I had been there he would not now be lying dead. Michel! Michel!'

When morning came she was silent. They thought she had fallen asleep. She was dead too.

XXXII

Which describes how Nectaire's flute was heard in the tavern of Clodomir.

MADAME DE LA VERDELIÈRE having failed to force an entrée as sick-nurse, returned after several days had elapsed —during the absence of Madame des Aubels—to ask Maurice d'Esparvieu for his subscription to the French churches. Arcade led her to the bedside of the convalescent. Maurice whispered in the angel's ear:

'Traitor, deliver me from this ogress immediately, or you will be answerable for the evil which will soon befall.'

'Be calm,' said Arcade, with a confident air.

After the conventional complimentary flourishes, Madame de la Verdelière signed to Maurice to dismiss the angel. Maurice feigned not to understand. And Madame de la Verdelière disclosed the ostensible reason of her visit.

'Our churches,' she said, 'our beloved country churches —what is to become of them?'

Arcade gazed at her angelically and sighed.

'They will disappear, madame; they will fall into ruin. And what a pity! I shall be inconsolable. The church amid the villagers' cottages is like the hen amid her chickens.'

'Just so!' exclaimed Madame de la Verdelière with a delighted smile. 'It is just like that.'

'And the spires, madame?'

'Oh, monsieur, the spires! . . .'

'Yes, the spires, madame, that stick up into the skies towards the naked bottoms of the cherubim, like so many syringes.'

Madame de la Verdelière incontinently left the place.

That same day Monsieur l'Abbé Patouille came to offer the wounded man good counsel and consolation. He exhorted him to break with his bad companions and to be reconciled to his family.

He drew a picture of the sorrowful father, the mother in tears, ready to receive their long lost child with open arms. Renouncing with manly effort a life of profligacy and deluding joys, Maurice would recover his peace and

strength of mind, he would free himself from devouring chimeras, and shake off the Evil Spirit.

Young d'Esparvieu thanked Abbé Patouille for all his kindness, and made a protestation of his religious feelings.

'Never,' said he, 'have I had such faith. And never have I been in such need of it. Just imagine, Monsieur l'Abbé, I have to teach my guardian angel his catechism all over again, for he has quite forgotten it!'

Monsieur l'Abbé Patouille heaved a deep sigh, and exhorted his dear child to pray, there being no other resource but prayer for a soul assailed by the devil.

'Monsieur l'Abbé,' asked Maurice, 'may I introduce my guardian angel to you? Do stay a moment; he has gone to get me some cigarettes.'

'Unhappy child!'

And Abbé Patouille's fat cheeks drooped in token of affliction. But almost immediately they plumped up again as a sign of light-heartedness. For in his heart there was matter for rejoicing. Public opinion was improving. The Jacobins, the Freemasons, the Coalitionists were everywhere in disgrace. The Smart Set led the way. The Académie Française was of the right way of thinking. The number of Christian schools was increasing by leaps and bounds. The young men of the Quartier Latin were submitting to the Church, and the École Normale exhaled the perfume of the seminary. The cross was gaining the day; but money was wanted—more money, always money.

After six weeks' rest, Maurice was allowed by his doctor to take a drive. He wore his arm in a sling. His mistress and his friend went with him. They drove to the Bois, and took a gentle pleasure in looking upon the grass and the trees. They smiled on everything and everything smiled on them. As Arcade had said, their faults had made them better. By the unlooked-for ways of jealousy and anger, Maurice had attained to calm and kindliness. He still loved Gilberte, and he loved her with an indulgent love. The angel still desired her as much as ever, but having once possessed her, his desire had lost the sting of curiosity. Gilberte forbore trying to please, and thereby pleased the more. They drank milk at the Cascade and

found it good. They were all three innocent. Arcade forgot the injustice of the old tyrant of the world. But he was soon to be reminded of it.

On entering his friend's house he found Zita awaiting him looking like a statue in ivory and gold.

'You excite my pity,' she said to him. 'The day is at hand the like of which has never dawned since the beginning of time, and perhaps will never dawn again before the sun enters with all its train into the constellation of Hercules. We are on the eve of surprising Ialdabaoth in His palace of porphyry, and you, who are burning to deliver the heavens, who were so eager to enter in triumph into your emancipated country — you suddenly forget your noble purpose and fall asleep in the arms of the daughters of men. What pleasure can you find in intercourse with these unclean little animals, composed, as they are, of elements so unstable that they may be said to be in a state of constant evanescence? O Arcade! I was indeed right to distrust you. You are but an intellectual; you do but feel idle curiosity. You are incapable of action.'

'You misjudge me, Zita,' replied the angel. 'It is the nature of the sons of heaven to love the daughters of men. Corruptible though it be, the material part of women and of flowers charms the senses none the less. But not one of these little animals can make me forget my hatred and my love, and I am ready to rise up against Ialdabaoth.'

Zita expressed her satisfaction at seeing him in this resolute mood. She urged him to pursue the accomplishment of this vast undertaking with undiminished ardour. Nothing must be hurried or deferred.

'A great action, Arcade, is made up of a multitude of small ones; the most majestic whole is composed of a thousand minute details. Let us neglect nothing.'

She had come to take him to a meeting where his presence was required. They were to take a census of the revolutionaries.

She added but one word:

'Nectaire will be there.'

When Maurice saw Zita, he deemed her lacking in attraction. She failed to please him because she was

perfectly beautiful and because true beauty always caused him painful surprise. Zita inspired him with antipathy when he learned that she was an angel in revolt and that she had come to seek Arcade to take him away among the conspirators.

The poor child tried to retain his companion by all the means that his wit and the circumstances afforded him. If his guardian angel would only remain with him he would take him to a magnificent boxing match, to a revue where he would witness the apotheosis of Poincaré, or, lastly, to a certain house he knew of where he would behold women remarkable for their beauty, talents, vices, or deformities. But the angel would not allow himself to be tempted, and said he was going with Zita.

'What for?'

'To plot the conquest of the skies.'

'Still the same nonsense! The conquest of—— But there, I proved to you that it was neither possible nor desirable.'

'Good night, Maurice.'

'You are going? Well, I will accompany you.'

And Maurice, his arm in a sling, went with Arcade and Zita all the way to Clodomir's tavern at Montmartre, where the tables were laid in an arbour in the garden.

Prince Istar and Théophile were already there, with a little yellow creature who looked like a child, and was, in fact, a Japanese angel.

'We are only waiting for Nectaire,' said Zita.

And at that moment the old gardener noiselessly appeared. He took his seat, and his dog lay down at his feet. French cooking is the best in the world. It is a glory that will transcend all others when humanity has grown wise enough to put the spit above the sword. Clodomir served the angels, and the mortal who was with them, with a soup made of cabbages and bacon, a loin of pork, and kidneys cooked in wine, thereby proving himself a real Montmartre cook, and showing that he had not been spoilt by the Americans, who corrupt the most excellent chefs of the City of Restaurants.

Clodomir brought forth some claret, which, though

unrecorded among the renowned vintages of Médoc, gave evidence by its choice and delicate aroma of the high nobility of its origin. We must not omit to chronicle that, after this wine and many others had been drunk, the cellarman, in solemn state, produced a burgundy choice and rare, full-bodied yet not heavy, generous yet delicate, rich with the true Burgundian mellowness, a noble and, withal, a somewhat heady wine, that brought delight alike to mind and sense.

'Hail to thee, Dionysus, greatest of the gods!' cried old Nectaire, raising his glass on high. 'I drink to thee who wilt restore the Golden Age, and give again to mortal men, who will become heroes as of old, the grapes which the Lesbians used to cull, long since, from the vines of Methymna; who wilt restore the vineyards of Thasus, the white clusters of Lake Mareotis, the storehouses of Falernus, the vines of the Tmolus, and the wine of Phanae, of all wines the king. And the juice thereof shall be divine, and, as in old Silenus's day, men shall grow drunk with wisdom and with love.'

When the coffee was served Prince Istar, Zita, Arcade, and the Japanese angel took it in turns to give an account of the forces assembled against Ialdabaoth. Angels, in exchanging eternal bliss for the sufferings of an earthly life, grow in intelligence, acquire the means of going astray and the faculty of self-contradiction. Consequently their meetings, like those of men, are tumultuous and confused. Did one of them deal in figures, the others immediately called them in question. They could not add one number to another without quarrelling, and arithmetic itself, subjected to passion, lost its certitude. The kerûb, who had brought with him the pious Théophile, waxed indignant when he heard the musician praising the Lord, and rained down such blows on his head as would have felled an ox. But the head of a musician is harder than a bucranium, and the blows which Théophile received did not avail to modify that angel's notion of divine providence. Arcade having at great length set up his scientific idealism in opposition to Zita's pragmatism, the beautiful archangel told him that he argued badly.

'And you are surprised at that!' exclaimed young Maurice's guardian angel. 'I argue, like you, in the language of human beings. And what is human language but the cry of the beasts of the forests or the mountains, complicated and corrupted by arrogant anthropoids. How then, Zita, can one be expected to argue well with a collection of angry or plaintive sounds like that? Angels do not reason at all; men, being superior to the angels, reason imperfectly. I will not mention the professors who think to define the absolute with the aid of cries that they have inherited from the pithecanthropoid monkeys, marsupials, and reptiles, their ancestors! It is a colossal joke! How it would amuse the demiurge, if He had any brains!'

It was a beautiful starlight night. The gardener was silent.

'Nectaire,' said the beautiful archangel, 'play to us on your flute, if you are not afraid that the earth and heaven will be stirred to their depths thereby.'

Nectaire took up his flute. Young Maurice lighted a cigarette. The flame burnt brightly for a moment, casting back the sky and its stars into the shadows, and then died out. And Nectaire sang of this flame on his divine flute. The silvery voice soared aloft and sang:

'That flame was a whole universe which fulfilled its destiny in less than a minute. Suns and planets were formed therein. Venus Urania apportioned the orbits of the wandering spheres in those infinite spaces. Beneath the breath of Eros—the first of the gods—plants, animals, and thoughts sprang into being. In the twenty seconds which hurried by betwixt the life and death of those worlds, civilizations were unfolded, and empires sank in long decline. Mothers shed tears; and songs of love, cries of hatred, and sighs of victims rose upward to the silent skies.

'In proportion to its minuteness, that universe lasted as long as this one—whereof we see a few atoms glittering above our heads—has lasted or will last. They are, one no less than the other, but a gleam in the infinite.'

As the clear, pure notes welled up into the charmed air,

the earth melted into a soft mist, the stars revolved rapidly in their orbits, the Great Bear fell asunder, its parts flew far and wide. Orion's belt was shattered; the Pole Star forsook its magnetic axis. Sirius, whose incandescent flame had lit up the far horizon, grew blue, then red, flickered, and suddenly died out. The shaken constellations formed new signs which were extinguished in their turn. By its incantations the magic flute had compressed into one brief moment the life and the movement of this universe which seems unchanging and eternal both to men and angels. It ceased, and the heavens resumed their immemorial aspect. Nectaire had vanished. Clodomir asked his guests if they were pleased with the cabbage soup which, in order that it might be strong, had been kept simmering for twenty-four hours on the fire, and he sang the praises of the Beaujolais which they had drunk.

The night was mild. Arcade, accompanied by his guardian angel, Théophile, Prince Istar, and the Japanese angel, escorted Zita home.

XXXIII

How a dreadful crime plunges Paris into a state of terror.

The city was asleep. Their footsteps rang loudly on the deserted pavement. Having reached the corner of the rue Feutrier, half-way up Montmartre, the little company halted before the dwelling of the beautiful angel. Arcade was talking about the Thrones and Dominations with Zita, who, her finger on the bell, could not make up her mind to ring. Prince Istar was tracing the mechanism of a new sort of bomb on the pavement with the end of his stick, and bellowed so loudly that he woke the sleeping citizens and stirred into activity the amatory passions of the neighbouring Pasiphaës. Théophile was singing the barcarole from the second act of *Aline, Queen of Golconda* at the top of his voice. Maurice, his arm in a sling, was fencing left-handed with the Japanese, striking sparks from the pavement, and crying 'A hit! a hit!' in a piercing voice.

Meanwhile Inspector Grolle at the corner of the next street was dreaming. He had the bearing of a Roman legionary and displayed all the characteristics of that proudly servile race, who, ever since men first took to building cities, have been the mainstay of empires and the support of ruling houses. Inspector Grolle was very strong, but very tired. He suffered from an arduous profession, and from lack of food. He was a man devoted to duty, but still a man, and he was unable to resist the wiles, the charms, and the blandishments of the gay ladies whom he met in swarms in the shadows along the empty streets and round about pieces of waste ground; he loved them. He loved like a soldier under arms. It tired him, but courage conquered fatigue. Though he had not yet reached the middle of life's way, he longed for sweet repose and peaceful country pursuits. At the corner of the rue Muller, on this mild night, he stood lost in thought. He was dreaming of the house where he was born, of the little olive wood, of his father's bit of ground, of his old mother, bent with long and heavy labour, whom he would never see again. Roused from his reverie by the nocturnal tumult, Inspector Grolle turned the corner of the street, and looked rather unfavourably at the band of loiterers, wherein his social instinct suspected enemies of law and order. He was patient and resolute. After a lengthy silence, he said, with awe-inspiring calm:

'Move on, there!'

But Maurice and the Japanese angel were fencing and heard nothing. The musician heard nothing but his own melodies. Prince Istar was absorbed in the explanation of explosive formulae. Zita was discussing with Arcade the greatest enterprise that had ever been conceived since the solar system issued from its original nebula—and thus they all remained unconscious of their surroundings.

'Move on, I tell you!' repeated Inspector Grolle.

This time the angels heard the solemn word of warning, but either through indifference or contempt, they neglected to obey, and continued their talk, their songs, and their cries.

'So you want to be taken up, do you?' shouted Inspector Grolle, clapping his great hand on Prince Istar's shoulder.

The kerûb was indignant at this vile contact, and with one blow from his formidable fist sent the inspector flying into the gutter. But Constable Fesandet was already running to his comrade's aid, and they both fell upon the prince, whom they belaboured with mechanic fury, and whom, notwithstanding his strength and weight, they would perchance have dragged all bleeding to the police station, had not the Japanese angel overset them one after the other without effort, and reduced them to writhing and shrieking in the mud, before Maurice, Arcade, and Zita had time to intervene. As to the angelic musician, he stood apart trembling, and invoked the heavens.

At this moment two bakers who were kneading their dough in a neighbouring cellar ran out at the noise, in their white aprons, stripped to the waist. With an instinctive feeling for social solidarity they took the side of the downfallen police. Théophile conceived a just fear at the sight of them, and fled away; they caught him and were about to hand him over to the guardians of the peace, when Arcade and Zita tore him from their hands. The fight continued, unequal and terrible, between the two angels and the two bakers. Like an athlete of Lysippus in strength and beauty, Arcade smothered his heavy adversary in his arms. The beautiful archangel drove her dagger into the baker who had attacked her. A dark stream of blood flowed down over his hairy chest, and the two white-capped supporters of the law sank to the ground.

Constable Fesandet had fainted face downwards in the gutter. But Inspector Grolle, who had got up, blew a blast on his whistle loud enough to be heard at the neighbouring police station, and sprang upon young Maurice, who, having but one arm with which to defend himself, fired his revolver with his left hand at the inspector, who put his hand to his heart, staggered, and dropped down. He gave a long sigh, and the shadows of eternity darkened his eyes.

Meanwhile, windows opened one by one, and heads looked out on the street. A sound of heavy steps

approached. Two policemen on bicycles debouched upon the street. Thereupon Prince Istar flung a bomb which shook the ground, put out the gas, shattered some of the houses, and enveloped the flight of young Maurice and the angels in a dense smoke.

Arcade and Maurice came to the conclusion that the safest thing to do after this adventure was to return to the little flat in the rue de Rome. They would certainly not be sought for immediately and probably not at all, the bomb thrown by the kerûb having fortunately wiped out all witnesses of the affair. They fell asleep towards dawn, and they had not yet awoke at ten o'clock in the morning when the concierge brought their tea. While eating his toast and butter and slice of ham young d'Esparvieu remarked to the angel:

'I used to think that a murder was something very extraordinary. Well, I was mistaken. It is the simplest, the most natural action in the world.'

'And of most ancient tradition,' replied the angel. 'For long centuries it was both usual and necessary for man to kill and despoil his fellows. It is still recommended in warfare. It is also honourable to attempt human life in certain definite circumstances, and people approved when you wanted to assassinate me, Maurice, because it appeared to you that I had been intimate with your mistress. But killing a police inspector is not the action of a man of fashion.'

'Be silent,' exclaimed Maurice, 'be silent, scoundrel! I killed the poor inspector instinctively, not knowing what I was doing. I am grieved to my heart about it. But it is not I, it is you who are the guilty one; you who are the murderer. It was you who lured me along this path of revolt and violence which leads to the pit. You have been my undoing. You have sacrificed my peace of mind, my happiness, to your pride and your wickedness, and all in vain; for I warn you, Arcade, you will not succeed in what you are undertaking.'

The concierge brought in the newspapers. On seeing them Maurice grew pale. They announced the outrage in the rue de Ramey in huge headlines:

'An inspector killed—Two cyclist policemen and two bakers seriously wounded—Three houses blown up, numerous victims.'

Maurice let the paper drop, and said in a weak, plaintive voice:

'Arcade, why did you not slay me in the little garden at Versailles amidst the roses, to the song of the blackbirds?'

Meanwhile terror reigned in Paris. In the public squares and in the crowded streets, housewives, string bag in hand, grew pale as they listened to the story of the crime, and consigned the perpetrators to the most dreadful punishment. Shopkeepers, standing at the doors of their shops, put it all down to the Anarchists, Syndicalists, Socialists, and Radicals, and demanded that special measures should be taken against them.

The more thoughtful people recognized the handiwork of the Jew and the German, and demanded the expulsion of all aliens. Many vaunted the ways of America and advocated lynching. In addition to the printed news sinister rumours became current. Explosions had been heard at various places; everywhere bombs had been discovered; everywhere individuals, taken for malefactors, had been struck down by the popular arm and given up to justice, torn to ribbons. On the place de la République a drunkard who was crying 'Down with the police' was torn to pieces by the crowd.

The President of the Council and Minister of Justice held long conferences with the Prefect of Police, and they agreed to take immediate action. In order to allay the excitement of the Parisians, they arrested five or six hooligans out of the thirty thousand which the capital contains. The chief of the Russian police, believing he recognized in this attack the methods of the Nihilists, demanded, on behalf of his Government, that a dozen refugees should be given up. The demand was immediately granted. Proceedings were also taken for certain individuals to be extradited to ensure the safety of the King of Spain.

On learning of these energetic measures, Paris breathed once more, and the evening papers congratulated the Government. There was excellent news of the wounded.

They were out of danger and identified as their assailants all who were brought before them.

True, Inspector Grolle was dead; but two Sisters of Mercy kept vigil at his side, and the President of the Council came and laid the Cross of Honour on the breast of this victim of duty.

At night there were panics. In the avenue de la Révolte the police, noticing a travelling acrobat's caravan on a piece of waste ground, took it for the retreat of a band of robbers. They whistled for help, and when they were a goodly number, attacked the caravan. Some worthy citizens joined them; fifteen thousand revolver shots were fired, the caravan was blown up with dynamite, and among the debris they found the corpse of a monkey.

XXXIV

Which contains an account of the arrest of Bouchotte and Maurice, of the disaster which befell the d'Esparvieu library, and of the departure of the angels.

MAURICE D'ESPARVIEU passed a terrible night. At the least sound he seized his revolver that he might not fall alive into the hands of justice. When morning came he snatched the newspapers from the hands of the concierge, devoured them greedily, and gave a cry of joy; he had just read that Inspector Grolle having been taken to the morgue for the post-mortem, the police surgeons had only discovered bruises and contusions of a very superficial nature, and stated that death had been brought about by the rupture of an aneurism of the aorta.

'You see, Arcade,' he exclaimed triumphantly; 'you see I am not an assassin. I am innocent. I could never have imagined how extremely agreeable it is to be innocent.'

Then he grew thoughtful, and—no unusual phenomenon—reflection dissipated his gaiety.

'I am innocent. But there is no disguising the fact,' he said, shaking his head, 'I am one of a band of malefactors. I live with miscreants. You are in your right place there, Arcade, for you are deceitful, cruel, and perverse. But I

come of good family, and have received an excellent education, and I blush for it.'

'I also,' said Arcade, 'have received an excellent education.'

'Where was that?'

'In heaven.'

'No, Arcade, no; you never had any education. If good principles had been inculcated into you, you would still hold them. Such principles are never lost. In my childhood I learnt to revere my family, my country, my religion. I have not forgotten the lesson and I never shall. Do you know what shocks me most in you? It is not your perversity, your cruelty, your black ingratitude; it is not your agnosticism, which may be borne with at a pinch; it is not your scepticism, though it is very much out of date (for since the national awakening there is no longer any scepticism in France); no, what disgusts me in you is your lack of taste, the bad style of your ideas, the inelegance of your doctrines. You think like an intellectual, you speak like a freethinker, you have theories which reek of Radicalism, and Combeism,[1] and all ignoble systems. Get along with you! you disgust me. Arcade, my old friend, Arcade, my dear angel, Arcade, my beloved child, listen to your guardian angel! Yield to my prayers, renounce your mad ideas; become good, simple, innocent, and happy once more. Put on your hat, come with me to Notre-Dame. We will say a prayer and burn a candle together.'

Meanwhile public opinion was still active in the matter; the leading papers, the organs of the national awakening, in articles of real elevation and real depth, unravelled the philosophy of this monstrous attack which was revolting to the conscience. They discovered the real origin, the indirect but effective cause in the revolutionary doctrines which had been disseminated unchecked, in the weakening of social ties, the relaxing of moral discipline, in the repeated appeals to every appetite, to every greedy desire. It would be needful, so as to cut down the evil at its root, to repudiate as quickly as possible all such chimeras and

[1] J. L. E. Combes, anti-clerical premier.

Utopias as Syndicalism, the income tax, etc. Many newspapers, and these not the least important, pointed out that the recrudescence of crime was but the natural fruit of impiety, and concluded that the salvation of society lay in a unanimous and sincere return to religion. On the Sunday which followed the crime the congregations in the churches were noticed to be unusally large.

Judge Salneuve, who was entrusted with the task of investigation, first examined the persons arrested by the police, and lost his way among attractive but illusory clues; however, the report of the detective Montremain, which was laid before him, put him on the right road, and soon led him to recognize the miscreants of La Jonchère as the authors of the crime of the rue de Ramey. He ordered a search to be made for Arcade and Zita, and issued a warrant against Prince Istar, on whom two detectives laid hands as he was leaving Bouchotte's, where he had been depositing some bombs of new design. The kerûb, on learning the detectives' intentions, smiled broadly and asked them if they had a powerful motor car. On their replying that they had one at the door he assured them that was all he wanted. Thereupon he felled the two detectives on the stairs, walked up to the waiting car, flung the chauffeur under a motor bus which was opportunely passing, and seized the steering wheel under the eyes of the terrified crowd.

That same evening Monsieur Jeancourt, the police magistrate, entered Théophile's rooms just when Bouchotte was swallowing a raw egg to clear her voice, for she was to sing her new song, *They haven't got any in Germany*, at the National Eldorado that evening. The musician was absent. Bouchotte received the magistrate, and received him with a hauteur which intensified the simplicity of her attire; Bouchotte was *en déshabillé*. The worthy magistrate seized the score of *Aline, Queen of Golconda*, and the love letters which the singer carefully preserved in the drawer of the table by her bed, for she was an orderly young woman. He was about to withdraw when he espied a cupboard, which he opened with a careless air, and found machines capable of blowing up half Paris, and a pair of

large white wings, whose nature and use appeared inexplicable to him. Bouchotte was invited to complete her toilette, and, in spite of her cries, was taken off to the police station.

Monsieur Salneuve was indefatigable. After the examination of the papers seized in Bouchotte's house, and acting on the information of Montremain, he issued a warrant for the arrest of young d'Esparvieu, which was executed on Wednesday, the 27th May, at seven o'clock in the morning, with great discretion. For three days Maurice had neither slept nor eaten, loved nor lived. He had not a moment's doubt as to the nature of the matutinal visit. At the sight of the police magistrate a strange calm fell on him. Arcade had not returned to sleep in the flat. Maurice begged the magistrate to wait for him, and made a careful toilet, then he accompanied the magistrate to the taxi that was waiting at the door. He felt a calmness of mind which was barely disturbed when the door of the conciergerie closed on him. Alone in his cell, he climbed upon the table to look out. His tranquillity was due to his weariness of spirit, to his numbed senses, and to the fact that he no longer stood in fear of arrest. His misfortune endowed him with superior wisdom. He felt he had fallen into a state of grace. He did not think too highly or too humbly of himself, but left his cause in the hands of God. With no desire to cover up his faults, which he would not hide even from himself, he addressed himself in mind to Providence, to point out that if he had fallen into disorder and rebellion it was to lead his erring angel back into the straight path. He stretched himself on his couch and slept in peace.

On hearing of the arrest of a music-hall singer and of a young man of fashion, both Paris and the provinces felt painful surprise. Deeply stirred by the tragic accounts which the leading newspapers were bringing out, the general idea was that the sort of people the authorities ought to bring to justice were ferocious anarchists, all reeking and dripping from deeds of blood and arson; but they failed to understand what the world of art and fashion should have to do with such things. At this news, which

he was one of the last to hear, the President of the Council and Keeper of the Seals started up in his chair. The sphinxes that adorned it were less terrible than he, and in the throes of his angry meditation he cut the mahogany of his imperial table with his penknife, after the manner of Napoleon. And when Judge Salneuve, whose attendance he had commanded, appeared before him, the president flung his penknife in the grate, as Louis XIV flung his cane out of the window in the presence of Lauzun; and it cost him a supreme effort to master himself and to say in a voice of suppressed fury:

'Are you mad? Surely I said often enough that I meant the plot to be Anarchist, anti-social, fundamentally anti-social and anti-governmental, with a shade of Syndicalism. I have made it clear enough that I wanted it kept within these lines; and what do you go and make of it? The vengeance of anarchists and aspirants to freedom? Whom do you arrest? A singer adored of the Nationalist public, and the son of a man highly esteemed in the Catholic Party, who receives our bishops and has the entrée to the Vatican; a man who may be one day sent as ambassador to the pope. At one blow you alienate one hundred and sixty deputies and forty senators of the Right, on the very eve of a motion to discuss the question of religious pacification; you embroil me with my friends of to-day, with my friends of to-morrow. Was it to find out if you were in the same predicament as des Aubels that you seized the love letters of young Maurice d'Esparvieu? I can put your mind at rest on that point. You are, and all Paris knows it. But it is not to avenge your personal affronts that you are on the bench.'

'Monsieur le Garde des Sceaux,' murmured the judge, nearly apoplectic and in a choked voice, 'I am an honest man.'

'You are a fool . . . and a provincial. Listen to me; if Maurice d'Esparvieu and Mademoiselle Bouchotte are not released within half an hour I will crush you like a piece of glass. Be off!'

Monsieur René d'Esparvieu went himself to fetch his son from the Conciergerie, and took him back to the old

house in the rue Garancière. The return was triumphant. The news had been disseminated that Maurice had with generous imprudence interested himself in an attempt to restore the monarchy, and that Judge Salneuve, the infamous freemason, the tool of Combes and André, had tried to compromise the young man by making him out to be an accomplice of a band of criminals.

That was what Abbé Patouille seemed to think, and he answered for Maurice as for himself. It was known, moreover, that breaking with his father, who had rallied to the support of the Republic, young d'Esparvieu was on the high road to becoming an out-and-out Royalist. The people who had an inside knowledge of things saw in his arrest the vengeance of the Jews. Was not Maurice a notorious anti-Semite? Catholic youths went forth to hurl imprecations at Judge Salneuve under the windows of his residence in the rue Guénégaud, opposite the Mint.

On the boulevard du Palais a band of students presented Maurice with a branch of palm. Maurice made a charming reply.

Maurice was overcome with emotion when he beheld the old house in which his childhood had been spent, and fell weeping into his mother's arms.

It was a great day, unhappily marred by one painful incident. Monsieur Sariette, who had lost his reason as a consequence of the shocking events that had taken place in the rue de Courcelles, had suddenly become violent. He had shut himself up in the library, and there he had remained for twenty-four hours, uttering the most horrible cries, and, turning a deaf ear alike to threats and entreaties, refused to come out. He had spent the night in a condition of extreme restlessness, for all night long the lamp had been seen passing rapidly to and fro behind the curtains. In the morning, hearing Hippolyte shouting to him from the court below, he opened the window of the room of the globes and the philosophers, and heaved two or three rather weighty tomes on to the old valet's head. The whole of the domestic staff—men, women, and boys—hurried to the spot, and the librarian proceeded to throw

out books by the armful on to their heads. In view of the gravity of the situation, Monsieur René d'Esparvieu did not disdain to intervene. He appeared in night cap and dressing-gown, and attempted to reason with the poor lunatic, whose only reply was to pour forth torrents of abuse on the man whom till then he had worshipped as his benefactor, and to endeavour to crush him beneath all the Bibles, all the Talmuds, all the sacred books of India and Persia, all the Greek Fathers, and all the Latin Fathers, Saint John Chrysostom, Saint Gregory Nazianzen, Saint Augustine, Saint Jerome, all the apologists, aye, and under the *Histoire des Variations*, annotated by Bossuet himself! Octavos, quartos, folios came crashing down, and lay in a sordid heap on the courtyard pavement. The letters of Gassendi, of Père Mersenne, of Pascal, were blown about hither and thither by the wind. The lady's-maid, who had stooped down to rescue some of the sheets from the gutter, got a blow on the head from an enormous Dutch atlas. Madame René d'Esparvieu had been terrified by the ominous sounds, and appeared on the scene without waiting to apply the finishing touches of powder and paint. When he caught sight of her, old Sariette became more violent than ever. Down they came one after another as hard as he could pelt them; the busts of the poets, philosophers, and historians of antiquity—Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides, Herodotus, Thucydides, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, Demosthenes, Cicero, Virgil, Horace, Seneca, Epictetus—all lay scattered on the ground. The celestial sphere and the terrestrial globe descended with a terrifying crash that was followed by a ghastly hush, broken only by the shrill laughter of little Léon, who was looking down on the scene from a window above. A locksmith having opened the library door, all the household hastened to enter, and found the aged Sariette entrenched behind piles of books, busily engaged in tearing and slashing away at the Lucretius of the Prior de Vendôme annotated in Voltaire's own hand. They had to force a way through the barricade. But the maniac, perceiving that his stronghold was being invaded, fled away and escaped on to the roof. For two whole hours he gave

vent to shouts and yells that were heard far and wide. In the rue Garancière the crowd kept growing bigger and bigger. All had their eyes fixed on the unhappy creature, and whenever he stumbled on the slates, which cracked beneath him, they gave a shout of terror. In the midst of the crowd the Abbé Patouille, who expected every moment to see him hurled into space, was reciting the prayers for the dying, and making ready to give him the absolution *in extremis*. There was a cordon of police round the house keeping order. Someone summoned the fire brigade, and the sound of their approach was soon heard. They placed a ladder against the wall of the house, and after a terrific struggle managed to secure the maniac, who in the course of his desperate resistance had one of the muscles of his arm torn out. He was immediately removed to an asylum.

Maurice dined at home, and there were smiles of tenderness and affection when Victor, the old butler, brought on the roast veal. Monsieur l'Abbé Patouille sat at the right hand of the Christian mother, unctuously contemplating the family which heaven had so plentifully blessed. Nevertheless, Madame d'Esparvieu was ill at ease. Every day she received anonymous letters of so insulting and coarse a nature that she thought at first they must come from a discharged footman. She now knew they were the handiwork of her youngest daughter, Berthe, a mere child! Little Léon, too, gave her pain and anxiety. He paid no attention to his lessons, and was given to bad habits. He showed a cruel disposition. He had plucked his sister's canaries alive; he stuck innumerable pins into the chair on which Mademoiselle Caporal was accustomed to sit, and had stolen fourteen francs from the poor girl, who did nothing but cry and dab her eyes and nose from morning till night.

No sooner was dinner over than Maurice rushed off to the little dwelling in the rue de Rome, impatient to meet his angel again. Through the door he heard a loud sound of voices, and saw assembled, in the room where the apparition had taken place, Arcade, Zita, the angelic musician, and the kerûb, who was lying on the bed,

smoking a huge pipe, carelessly scorching pillows, sheets, and coverlet. They embraced Maurice, and announced their departure. Their faces shone with happiness and courage. Alone, the inspired author of *Aline, Queen of Golconda*, shed tears and raised his terrified gaze to heaven. The kerûb forced him into the party of rebellion by setting before him two alternatives: either to allow himself to be dragged from prison to prison on earth, or to carry fire and sword into the palace of Ialdabaoth.

Maurice perceived with sorrow that the earth had scarcely any hold over them. They were setting out filled with immense hope, which was quite justifiable. Doubtless they were but a few combatants to oppose the innumerable soldiers of the sultan of the heavens; but they counted on compensating for the inferiority of their numbers by the irresistible impetus of a sudden attack. They were not ignorant of the fact that Ialdabaoth, who flatters Himself on knowing all things, sometimes allows Himself to be taken by surprise. And it certainly looked as if the first attack would have taken Him unawares had it not been for the warning of the archangel Michael. The celestial army had made no progress since its victory over the rebels before the beginning of time.

As regards armaments and material it was as out of date as the army of the Moors. Its generals slumbered in sloth and ignorance. Loaded with honours and riches, they preferred the delights of the banquet to the fatigues of war. Michael, the commander-in-chief, ever loyal and brave, had lost, with the passing of centuries, his fire and enthusiasm. The conspirators of 1914, on the other hand, knew the very latest and the most delicate appliances of science for the art of destruction. At length all was ready and decided upon. The army of revolt, assembled by corps, each a hundred thousand angels strong, on all the waste places of the earth—steppes, pampas, deserts, fields of ice and snow—was ready to launch itself against the sky. The angels, in modifying the rhythm of the atoms of which they are composed, are able to traverse the most varied mediums. Spirits that have descended on to the earth, being formed, since their incarnation, of

too compact a substance, can no longer fly of themselves, and to rise into ethereal regions and then insensibly grow volatilized, have need of the assistance of their brothers, who, though revolutionaries like themselves, nevertheless stayed behind in the empyrean and remained, not immaterial (for all is matter in the universe), but gloriously untrammelled and diaphanous. Certes, it was not without painful anxiety that Arcade, Istar, and Zita prepared themselves to pass from the heavy atmosphere of the earth to the limpid depths of the heavens. To plunge into the ether there is need to expend such energy that the most intrepid hesitate to take flight. Their very substance, while penetrating this fine medium, must in itself grow fine-spun, become vaporized, and pass from human dimensions to the volume of the vastest clouds which have ever enveloped the earth. Soon they would surpass in grandeur the uttermost planets, whose orbits they, invisible and imponderable, would traverse without disturbing.

In this enterprise—the vastest that angels could undertake—their substance would be ultimately hotter than the fire and colder than the ice, and they would suffer pangs sharper than death.

Maurice read all the daring and the pain of the undertaking in the eyes of Arcade.

'You are going?' he said to him, weeping.

'We are going, with Nectaire, to seek the great archangel to lead us to victory.'

'Whom do you call thus?'

'The priests of the demiurge have made him known to you in their calumnies.'

'Unhappy being,' sighed Maurice.

Arcade embraced him, and Maurice felt the angel's tears as they dropped upon his cheek.

XXXV

And last, wherein the sublime dream of Satan is unfolded.

CLIMBING the seven steep terraces which rise up from the bed of the Ganges to the temples muffled in creepers, the five angels reached, by half-obliterated paths, the wild garden filled with perfumed clusters of grapes and chattering monkeys, and, at the far end thereof, they discovered him whom they had come to seek. The archangel lay with his elbow on black cushions embroidered with golden flames. At his feet crouched lions and gazelles. Twined in the trees, tame serpents turned on him their friendly gaze. At the sight of his angelic visitors his face grew melancholy. Long since, in the days when, with his brow crowned with grapes and his sceptre of vine leaves in his hand, he had taught and comforted mankind, his heart had many times been heavy with sorrow; but never yet, since his glorious downfall, had his beautiful face expressed such pain and anguish.

Zita told him of the black standards assembled in crowds in all the waste places of the globe; of the deliverances premeditated and prepared in the provinces of heaven, where the first revolt had long ago been fomented.

'Prince,' she went on, 'your army awaits you. Come, lead it on to victory.'

'Friends,' replied the great archangel, 'I was aware of the object of your visit. Baskets of fruit and honeycombs await you under the shade of this mighty tree. The sun is about to descend into the roseate waters of the sacred river. When you have eaten, you will slumber pleasantly in this garden, where the joys of the intellect and of the senses have reigned since the day when I drove hence the spirit of the old demiurge. To-morrow I will give you my answer.'

Night hung its blue veils over the garden. Satan fell asleep. He had a dream, and in that dream, soaring over the earth, he saw it covered with angels in revolt, beautiful as gods, whose eyes darted lightning. And from pole

to pole one single cry, formed of a myriad cries, mounted towards him, filled with hope and love. And Satan said:

'Let us go forth! Let us seek the ancient Adversary in His high abode.' And he led the countless host of angels over the celestial plains. And Satan was cognizant of what took place in the heavenly citadel. When news of this second revolt came thither, the Father said to the Son:

'The irreconcilable foe is rising once again. Let us take heed to ourselves, and in this, our time of danger, look to our defences, lest we lose our high abode.'

And the Son, consubstantial with the Father, replied:

'We shall triumph under the sign that gave Constantine the victory.'

Indignation burst forth on the Mountain of God. At first the faithful seraphim condemned the rebels to terrible torture, but afterwards decided on doing battle with them. The anger burning in the hearts of all inflamed each countenance. They did not doubt of victory, but treachery was feared, and eternal darkness had been at once decreed for spies and alarmists.

There was shouting and singing of ancient hymns and praise of the Almighty. They drank of the mystic wine. Courage, over-inflated, came near to giving way, and a secret anxiety stole into the inner depths of their souls. The archangel Michael took supreme command. He reassured their minds by his serenity. His countenance, wherein his soul was visible, expressed contempt for danger. By his orders, the chiefs of the thunderbolts, the kerûbs, grown dull with the long interval of peace, paced with heavy steps the ramparts of the Holy Mountain, and, letting the gaze of their bovine eyes wander over the lightning-flashed clouds of their Lord, strove to place the divine batteries in position. After inspecting the defences, they swore to the Most High that all was in readiness. They took counsel together as to the plan they should follow. Michael was for the offensive. He, as a consummate soldier, said it was the supreme law. Attack, or be attacked—there was no middle course.

'Moreover,' he added, 'the offensive attitude is particularly suitable to the ardour of the Thrones and Dominations.'

Beyond that, it was impossible to obtain a word from the valiant chief, and this silence seemed the mark of a genius sure of himself.

As soon as the approach of the enemy was announced Michael sent forth three armies to meet them, commanded by the archangels Uriel, Raphael, and Gabriel. Standards, displaying all the colours of the Orient, were unfurled above the ethereal plains, and the thunders rolled over the starry floors. For three days and three nights was the lot of the terrible and adorable armies unknown on the Mountain of God. Towards dawn on the fourth day news came, but it was vague and confused. There were rumours of indecisive victories; of the triumph now of this side, now of that. There came reports of glorious deeds which were dissipated in a few hours.

The thunderbolts of Raphael, hurled against the rebels, had, it was said, consumed entire squadrons. The troops commanded by the impure Zita were thought to have been swallowed up in the whirlwind of a tempest of fire. It was believed that the savage Istar had been flung headlong into the gulf of perdition so suddenly that the blasphemies begun in his mouth had been forced backwards with explosive results. It was popularly supposed that Satan, laden with chains of adamant, had been plunged once again into the abyss. Meanwhile, the commanders of the three armies had sent no messages. Mutterings and murmurs, mingling with the rumours of glory, gave rise to fears of an indecisive battle, a precipitate retreat. Insolent voices gave out that a spirit of the lowest category, a guardian angel, the insignificant Arcade, had checked and routed the dazzling host of the three great archangels.

There were also rumours of wholesale defection in the seventh heaven, where rebellion had broken out before the beginning of time, and some had even seen black clouds of impious angels joining the armies of the rebels on earth. But no one lent an ear to the odious rumours, and stress was laid on the news of victory which ran from lip to lip, each statement readily finding confirmation. The high places resounded with hymns of joy; the seraphim celebrated on harp and psaltery Sabaoth, God of

Thunder. The voices of the elect united with those of the angels in glorifying the Invisible, and at the thought of the bloodshed that the ministers of holy wrath had caused among the rebels, sighs of relief and jubilation were wafted from the heavenly Jerusalem towards the Most High. But the beatitude of the most blessed, having swelled to the utmost limit before due time, could increase no more, and the very excess of their felicity completely dulled their senses.

The songs had not yet ceased when the guards watching on the ramparts signalled the approach of the first fugitives of the divine army: seraphim on tattered wing, flying in disorder, maimed kerûbs going on three feet. With impassive gaze, Michael, prince of warriors, measured the extent of the disaster, and his keen intelligence penetrated its causes. The armies of the living God had taken the offensive, but by one of those fatalities in war which disconcert the plans of the greatest captains, the enemy had also taken the offensive, and the effect was evident. Scarcely were the gates of the citadel opened to receive the glorious but shattered remnants of the three armies, when a rain of fire fell on the Mountain of God. Satan's army was not yet in sight, but the walls of topaz, the cupolas of emerald, the roofs of diamond, all fell in with an appalling crash under the discharge of the electrophores. The ancient thunderclouds essayed to reply, but the bolts fell short, and their thunders were lost in the deserted plains of the skies.

Smitten by an invisible foe, the faithful angels abandoned the ramparts. Michael went to announce to his God that the Holy Mountain would fall into the hands of the demon in twenty-four hours, and that nothing remained for the Master of the Heavens but to seek safety in flight. The seraphim placed the jewels of the celestial crown in coffers. Michael offered his arm to the Queen of Heaven, and the Holy Family escaped from the palace by a subterranean passage of porphyry. A deluge of fire was falling on the citadel. Regaining his post once more, the glorious archangel declared that he would never capitulate, and straightway advanced the standards of the living

God. That same evening the rebel host made its entry into the thrice-sacred city. On a fiery steed Satan led his demons. Behind him marched Arcade, Istar, and Zita. As in the ancient revels of Dionysus, old Nectaire bestrode his ass. Thereafter, floating out far behind, followed the black standards.

The garrison laid down their arms before Satan. Michael placed his flaming sword at the feet of the conquering archangel.

'Take back your sword, Michael,' said Satan. 'It is Lucifer who yields it to you. Bear it in defence of peace and law.' Then letting his gaze fall on the leaders of the celestial cohorts, he cried in a ringing voice:

'Archangel Michael, and you, Powers, Thrones, and Dominations, swear all of you to be faithful to your God.'

'We swear it,' they replied with one voice.

And Satan said:

'Powers, Thrones, and Dominations, of all past wars, I wish but to remember the invincible courage that you displayed and the loyalty which you rendered to authority, for these assure me of the steadfastness of the fealty you have just sworn to me.'

The following day, on the ethereal plain, Satan commanded the black standards to be distributed to the troops, and the winged soldiers covered them with kisses and bedewed them with tears.

And Satan had himself crowned God. Thronging round the glittering walls of heavenly Jerusalem, apostles, pontiffs, virgins, martyrs, confessors, the whole company of the elect, who during the fierce battle had enjoyed delightful tranquillity, tasted infinite joy in the spectacle of the coronation.

The elect saw with ravishment the Most High precipitated into hell, and Satan seated on the throne of the Lord. In conformity with the will of God which had cut them off from sorrow they sang in the ancient fashion the praises of their new master.

And Satan, piercing space with his keen glance, contemplated the little globe of earth and water where of old he had planted the vine and formed the first tragic chorus.

And he fixed his gaze on that Rome where the fallen God had founded his empire on fraud and lie. Nevertheless, at that moment a saint ruled over the Church. Satan saw him praying and weeping. And he said to him:

'To thee I entrust my spouse. Watch over her faithfully. In thee I confirm the right and power to decide matters of doctrine, to regulate the use of the sacraments, to make laws, and to uphold purity of morals. And the faithful shall be under obligation to conform thereto. My Church is eternal, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Thou art infallible. Nothing is changed.'

And the successor of the apostles felt flooded with rapture. He prostrated himself, and with his forehead touching the floor, replied:

'O Lord, my God, I recognize Thy voice! Thy breath has been wafted like balm to my heart. Blessed be Thy name. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.'

And Satan found pleasure in praise and in the exercise of his grace; he loved to hear his wisdom and his power belauded. He listened with joy to the canticles of the cherubim who celebrated his good deeds, and he took no pleasure in listening to Nectaire's flute, because it celebrated nature's self, yielded to the insect and to the blade of grass their share of power and love, and counselled happiness and freedom. Satan, whose flesh had crept, in days gone by, at the idea that suffering prevailed in the world, now felt himself inaccessible to pity. He regarded suffering and death as the happy results of omnipotence and sovereign kindness. And the savour of the blood of victims rose upward towards him like sweet incense. He fell to condemning intelligence and to hating curiosity. He himself refused to learn anything more, for fear that in acquiring fresh knowledge he might let it be seen that he had not known everything at the very outset. He took pleasure in mystery, and believing that he would seem less great by being understood, he affected to be unintelligible. Dense fumes of theology filled his brain. One day, following the example of his predecessor, he conceived the notion of proclaiming himself one god in three persons.

Seeing Arcade smile as this proclamation was made, he drove him from his presence. Istar and Zita had long since returned to earth. Thus centuries passed like seconds. Now, one day, from the altitude of his throne, he plunged his gaze into the depths of the pit and saw Ialdabaoth in the Gehenna, where he himself had long lain enchained. Amid the everlasting gloom Ialdabaoth still retained his lofty mien. Blackened and shattered, terrible and sublime, he glanced upwards at the palace of the King of Heaven with a look of proud disdain; then turned away his head. And the new god, as he looked upon his foe, beheld the light of intelligence and love pass across his sorrow-stricken countenance. And lo! Ialdabaoth was now contemplating the earth and, seeing it sunk in wickedness and suffering, he began to foster thoughts of kindliness in his heart. On a sudden he rose up, and beating the ether with his mighty arms, as though with oars, he hastened thither to instruct and to console mankind. Already his vast shadow shed upon the unhappy planet a shade soft as a night of love.

And Satan awoke bathed in an icy sweat.

Nectaire, Istar, Arcade, and Zita were standing round him. The finches were singing.

'Comrades,' said the great archangel, 'no—we will not conquer the heavens. Enough to have the power. War engenders war, and victory defeat.

'God, conquered, will become Satan; Satan, conquering, will become God. May the fates spare me this terrible lot; I love the hell which formed my genius. I love the earth where I have done some good, if it be possible to do any good in this fearful world where beings live but by rapine. Now, thanks to us, the God of old is dispossessed of His terrestrial empire, and every thinking being on this globe disdains Him or knows Him not. But what matter that men should be no longer submissive to Ialdabaoth if the spirit of Ialdabaoth is still in them; if they, like Him, are jealous, violent, quarrelsome, and greedy, and the foes of the arts and of beauty? What matter that they have rejected the ferocious demiurge, if they do not hearken to the friendly demons who teach all truths; to Dionysus,

Apollo, and the Muses? As to ourselves, celestial spirits, sublime demons, we have destroyed Ialdabaoth, our tyrant, if in ourselves we have destroyed Ignorance and Fear.'

And Satan, turning to the gardener, said:

'Nectaire, you fought with me before the birth of the world. We were conquered because we failed to understand that Victory is a spirit, and that it is in ourselves and in ourselves alone that we must attack and destroy Ialdabaoth.'

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